God-Realisation through Multiple Religions? A Study into Religious Experiences of Sri Ramakrishna

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Abstract

Sri Ramakrishna (1836–1886) is an important Hindu spiritual personality from the nineteenth century Bengal who is best known for his pluralistic approach to religions, which is based on his claim to have practically experienced the same divine reality through various strands of Hinduism and different religions of the world. This paper pertains to an analytical survey of his religious experiences including his supposed conversions to Islam and Christianity. Without taking an outright reductionist approach to all of his religious experiences it is viewed that claims of God-realisation through Islam and Christianity seem problematic from the perspective of these religious traditions. However, there is no denying of the fact that Ramakrishna’s supposed realisation of God through various religions can definitively inculcate in Hindus (and others who endorse his experiences) a tolerant attitude and pluralist approach to different religions. To that extent Ramakrishna’s religious experiences can be conducive to peaceful interreligious coexistence and interfaith harmony.

Keywords

Sri Ramakrishna, Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, God-realisation, religious experience, religious pluralism, interfaith harmony.

Introduction

Sri Ramakrishna (1836–1886) from Bengal is one of the important influences on modern Hinduism. His legacy resulted in “deepening of the national religious consciousness and a further growth of pride in the Hindu religious tradition.”1 Some scholars assign him a high place among world figures. For instance, the French Indologist Sylvain Levi (1863–1935) says that Ramakrishna’s name is a common property of mankind,2 and the noble

2 Swami Nirvedanada, “Sri Ramakrishna and Spiritual Renaissance,” in *The Cultural Heritage of
laureate Romain Rolland (1866–1944) regards him as the common chord which is found in all religions. F. Max Müller (1823–1900), the famous Orientalist and comparative religionist, too, has acknowledged Ramakrishna’s vast influence. Lastly, the famous American psychologist and pragmatist philosopher William James (1842–1910) has mentioned Ramakrishna and quoted his maxims in his book *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, which has now acquired the status of modern classic. Thus, it is obvious that Ramakrishna has left deep impressions on modern religious history of India and even beyond.

Ramakrishna’s eminence became manifest worldwide primarily through his foremost disciple Swami Vivekananda (1863–1902) who successfully projected him as a prophet of religious harmony and unity of religions in the course of his extensive lecture tours of North America and Europe, most importantly his triumphant address at the Parliament of World’s Religions held in Chicago, in 1893. Some independent scholars have also recognised Ramakrishna’s influence in popularising the idea of religious pluralism. For instance, Claude Alan Stark writes: “It is submitted that his approach to the dilemma of religious plurality is a significant one in religious history.” Modern-day Indian thought is especially characterised by acceptance of equality of religions and it is worth mentioning in this regard that the well-known historian of Indian religious movements John Nicol Farquhar (1861–1929) accredits this idea to Ramakrishna who has made it current coin in India. Similarly, Jane I. Smith of Harvard University remarks that his “emphasis on the unity of God over the unity of religions seems especially important to consider in the age of ecumenicity.” Thus, there remains little

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India, ed. Haridas Bhattacharyya (Calcutta: The Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, 1993), 691.
4 See F. Max Müller, *Ramakrishna: His Life and Sayings* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1901), 11, 96.
6 See Swami Bhajanandanda, *Harmony of Religions from the Standpoint of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda* (Calcutta: Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, 2008), 36.
doubt that his main influence relates to the idea of equal validity of all religions.

Here, it may be explicated that Ramakrishna’s pluralistic approach to religions is based on his particular understanding of religion. According to him, doctrines, rites, rituals, and external forms of religion are of secondary importance. Instead, he views that the essence of religion is spiritual realisation of God, which can be achieved through multiple religious paths. His view of Godhead itself is quite broad. He believes that since ultimate reality of God cannot be exhaustively described in human language, the notions of transcendental God as an impersonal attribute-less reality and immanent God as a person with attributes are both true in their own right. Going even further, he proclaims that God is both formless and with forms and thus tries to justify idol worship. He says that forms and images are symbols of God. People do not worship the idol; they worship God in the idol. Ramakrishna believes that God manifests Himself variously according to different spiritual levels and tastes of His devotees. In his words: “You know how it is. People have different tastes and can only digest certain kinds of foods. God has created various religions, various faiths—for people of differing capacities.” It is not difficult to understand that such view of religion and Godhead is conducive to a pluralistic approach to religion.

However, more than a mere conceptual construction, Ramakrishna’s belief in equal validity of different religions of the world for the purpose of God-realisation is based on his claim to have practically experienced the same divine reality through different religious paths within Hinduism and through other religions. In his own words: “I had to practice disciplines of all the religions: Hinduism, Islam and Christianity. I also followed the paths of the Shakts, Vaishnavas, Vedantists and other sects. I saw that it was the same Lord toward whom everybody was moving. Only their paths were different.” Such standpoint entails that plausibility of Ramakrishna’s view of religious pluralism depends, to a large measure, on authenticity of his practical

12 Gupta, *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, 170, 218. See also, Müller, *Ramakrishna: His Life and Sayings*, 159.
16 Ibid., 50.
religious experiences and meaningfulness of his conversion to Islam and Christianity and God-realisation through these religions. This necessitates an analytical survey and appraisal of his religious experiences. Below, such an undertaking is attempted in the light of his own sayings and views of scholars about his mystical and religious experiences. Then, the paper examines to what extent the postulate of equal validity of all religions can be based on these experiences.

Religious Experiences in Early Life

He was born as Gadadhar Chattopadhyaya on 17 February 1836, in Kamarkupur, a small village sixty miles away from Calcutta. Chattopadhyaya was a poor and the only Brahmin family of the village. Kamarkupur was situated on the road leading to a Hindu pilgrimage place Puri and the pilgrims, mostly sadhus, frequented this route. There was a rest house for the wayfarers in the village. Having a curious mind, good memory, and an aesthetic sense Ramakrishna would often pay visit to that rest house and find pleasure in the company of sadhus and listen to their stories of various saints, different places, prayers and songs. The biographical literature published by Ramakrishna’s devotees tells that owing to his religious temperament and aesthetic sense, he started having trances at a quite early age. In his later life, he himself narrated the story of one of such incidents in the following words:

One day in June or July, when I was six or seven years old, I was walking along a narrow path separating paddy fields, eating some of the puffed rice which I was carrying in a basket. Looking up at the sky I saw a beautiful sombre thunder cloud. As it spread rapidly enveloping the whole sky, a flock of snow white cranes flew overhead across it. It presented such a beautiful contrast that my

17 Unless otherwise stated, biographical details of Ramakrishna have been taken from the Life of Sri Ramakrishna: Compiled from Various Authentic Sources (Almora: Advaita Ashrama, 1929). For important points specific page number(s) have been given in the footnotes. A few paragraphs below are based on, with some changes and updates, this author’s unpublished MA dissertation titled: “Sri Ramakrishna’s Theory of Religious Pluralism: An Analytical and Critical Study,” International Islamic University, Islamabad. 1998.
18 ‘Ramakrishna’ is his spiritual epithet with which he became known to the world.
19 The date of birth according to Max Müller is 20 Feb. 1833. However, here the date given in the Life of Sri Ramakrishna: Compiled from Various Authentic Sources is preferred, considering it an “official” account of his life as this comprehensive biography has been published by Ramakrishna Order. See, Advaita Ashrama, Life of Sri Ramakrishna, 15. See also, Müller, Ramakrishna: His Life and Sayings, 30.
20 Advaita Ashrama, Life of Sri Ramakrishna, 26.
mind wandered to far off regions. Lost to outward sense, I fell down, and the
puffed rice was scattered in all directions. Some people found me in that plight
and carried me home in their arms. That was the first time I completely lost
consciousness in ecstasy.\textsuperscript{22}

This was the first “mystical experience” in his life. Two other similar events of
ecstasies have been reported when he was a boy,\textsuperscript{23} one of which occurred while
he was playing the role of Shiva in a dramatic performance in the village.\textsuperscript{24}

A turning point came in his life in 1855, when a rich widow Rani
Rasmani built a temple complex in Dakshineswar near Calcutta to appease the
Hindu goddess Kali, of whom she was a devotee. Rani Rasmani was a Sudra by
caste, and therefore no Brahmin was ready to officiate as a priest in a temple
owned by a non-Brahmin. Ramakrishna’s elder brother Ramkumar undertook
the job after some persuasion.\textsuperscript{25} Ramakrishna too joined his brother and agreed
to help him carry out priestly duties. After one year, when Ramkumar was
unable to carry out his duties as a priest anymore due to ill health, Ramakrishna
was appointed instead. After the death of his brother, his
behaviour changed considerably and he became increasingly immersed in the
worship of the goddess Kali whom he considered as “Mother.”

For him priestly performances were not simply duties but heartfelt
services. Soon his devotion to Kali immensely increased and he yearned with
all his soul for a \textit{darshan} (spiritual vision) of the deity. His attitude became
notably abnormal. He threw away the holy thread, an act that any faithful
Brahmin would never do, and put off his clothes. He would keep weeping for
hours and roll on the ground crying “Mother! Mother!” For a time he suffered
a burning sensation, a condition in which he felt that his whole body was
burning. His hair would stand on end and tears trickle on his cheeks on the
simple mention of the name of Kali. It became extremely difficult for him to
continue with formal worship and rituals. Even his personal necessities were
met with the help of his nephew Hariday. Indeed he gave every indication of
not being in his right mind\textsuperscript{26} and for most people he was but insane.

Being disappointed, one day he attempted to put an end to his life, when
all of a sudden he went through an experience, which he himself described in
the following words:

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{22} Ibid., 15–16.
  \item \textsuperscript{23} I. H. Azad Faruqi, \textit{Sufism and Bhakti: Mawlana Rum and Sri Ramakrishna} (New Delhi:
    Abhinav Publications, 1984), 70.
  \item \textsuperscript{24} Tejasananda, \textit{A Short Life of Sri Ramakrishna}, 16.
  \item \textsuperscript{25} See Advaita Ashrama, \textit{Life of Sri Ramakrishna}, 53–58.
  \item \textsuperscript{26} Lokeswarananda, \textit{The Way to God: As Taught by Sri Ramakrishna}, xii.
\end{itemize}
suddenly, the blessed Mother revealed Herself to me, and I fell unconscious on the floor. What happened after that externally, or how that day or the next passed, I do not know, but within me there was steady flow of undiluted bliss altogether new, and I felt the presence of the Divine Mother!\(^27\)

The biographers say that from then onwards he began to have visions periodically and acquired the power to see the Mother whenever he meditated. After this, he yearned for a vision of god as Rama, the tutelary deity of his family. At this stage his mind got itself moulded after Hanuman, the monkey devotee of Rama. It is said that at the end he had the vision of Sita, the consort of Rama.\(^28\) In any event, these visions did not calm him down; rather the symptoms of his abnormal character continued to exist.

Sometime in the year 1859, Rani Rasmani and her son-in-law Mathur Babu sent him back to his village considering that a change of environment might improve his behaviour and deteriorating health. He continued showing his strange behaviour at the village and his relatives were of the opinion that he was mad.\(^29\) His mother went to an exorcist to see if her son was possessed. Nevertheless, after a few months’ stay at the village, he improved to some extent. His mother thought that marriage might bring a change upon his mind. Curiously enough, when Ramakrishna was asked, he not only agreed with the proposal but also pointed out his bride-to-be. She was Sarada Devi, only five at that time, from a neighbouring village. Ramakrishna’s strange selection in this way is ascribed to divine guidance by his sympathetic biographers. After about one and a half years, he returned to Dakshineswar and assumed the charge of the worship of Kali. However, his unusual behaviour or madness returned again. The burning sensation, the sleeplessness, the tears, and cries for the Mother, all these symptoms reappeared.

**Formal Training in Different Spiritual Disciplines of Hindu Tradition**

Henceforth Ramakrishna’s religious experiences entered into a new phase. Hitherto, he had tried to see God without any external help or guidance. At that time, his training started under the instructions of various gurus who dramatically appeared on the scene one by one. First of all, a woman called Bhairavi Brahmani\(^30\) arrived at Dakshineswar in 1861. She was well-versed in

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\(^{27}\) Advaita Ashrama, *Life of Sri Ramakrishna*, 81.

\(^{28}\) Tejasananda, *A Short Life of Sri Ramakrishna*, 37–38.

\(^{29}\) See Advaita Ashrama, *Life of Sri Ramakrishna*, 111.

\(^{30}\) Max Müller stated that the name of this Brahmin woman is not known but the biographer in the *Life of Sri Ramakrishna* always refers to her with this name. We have no reason not to believe that Max Müller’s information was incomplete in this regard. See Müller, *Ramakrishna: His Life and Sayings*, 43.
Tantra practices and Vaishnava literature. Ramakrishna thought of her as mother and soon they were closely associated with each other. He narrated to her every incident of his Sadhana (spiritual practice), his visions, his sleeplessness, his total loss of outward consciousness during the meditation and other symptoms. She foresaw in him a great sage and started his training according to the Tantra discipline. She put him through all the exercises mentioned in the sixty-four Tantra books. Tantra practices also involve sexual practices for spiritual enhancement; however, the tradition maintains that Ramakrishna refrained from any sex indulgence in that course.\(^31\) He even never consummated his marriage with Sarada Devi, because for him

> [h]e alone is firmly established in the knowledge of Brahman, who can keep intact his renunciation and discrimination even while living with his wife. He alone has attained the supreme illumination who can look upon man and woman alike as Atman and deal with them accordingly.\(^32\)

Anyway, it is reported that he ascended the steps of these difficult exercises with swiftness and ease, and Bhairavi Brahmani declared that her disciple had attained perfection in that system of Yoga.\(^33\) She further claimed that Ramakrishna was an incarnation of God Himself.

Probably in the year 1864, a monk came to the temple garden of Dakshineswar named Jatadhari. Ramalala or the “child Rama” was his favourite deity, whose image he always kept with him. Impressed by Jatadhari’s devotion to Ramalala, Ramakrishna, too, embraced Ramalala as his devotional ideal. He used to spend whole day with Jatadhari watching Ramalala. Before leaving, Jatadhari had initiated Ramakrishna into the vatsalya form of worship. Eventually, he passed through all the Vaishnava Bhavas or attitudes towards God. These Bhavas are known as santa (attitude towards parents), dasya (attitude towards master), sakhyá (attitude towards friends) vatsalya (attitude towards children), and madhura (attitude towards sweetheart or husband).\(^34\)

Then, there came Tota Puri to the garden of Dakshineswar. He is said to have gone through severe ascetic discipline for forty years in dense forests. After acquiring the highest state of realisation of the ideals of Advaita Vedanta (non-qualified Monism), he was spending the remaining years of his life in making pilgrimages to the holy places. Coming in contact with Ramakrishna, he asked: ‘Would you like to learn Vedanta?’ Ramakrishna consented after

\(^{31}\) See Advaita Ashrama, *Life of Sri Ramakrishna*, 156–57.

\(^{32}\) Ibid., 240–41.

\(^{33}\) Tejasananda, *A Short Life of Sri Ramakrishna*, 49–51.

\(^{34}\) See Advaita Ashrama, *Life of Sri Ramakrishna*, 195–96.
“consultation” with his “Mother.” Tota Puri who believed only in Brahman the Absolute was struck by his superstition in addressing the stone image as mother.

Anyhow, Tota Puri initiated him into the *Sanyasa* (renunciation) sometime in 1864. For Ramakrishna, basically a *Baghata* (follower of the path of devotion to God), it was the first day of that new kind of *Sadhana*. He had to transcend the limits of personal devotion and submission to non-personal Absolute Reality. Tota Puri tried to help Ramakrishna fix his mind firmly in the Brahman. Ramakrishna found no difficulty in withdrawing his mind from every object except Kali. At last, he overcame that obstacle too and lost himself in the state known as *Nirvikalpa Samadhi* (immersion in the Ultimate Reality in such a way that distinction between knower and known is dissolved). The full account of this experience of Ramakrishna is provided in these words:

In that rapturous ecstasy the senses and mind stopped their functions. The body became motionless as a corpse. The universe rolled away from his vision—even space itself melted away. Everything was reduced to ideas, which floated like shadows in the dim background of the mind, only the faint consciousness of ‘I’ reappeared itself in dull monotony. Presently that too stopped, and what remained was Existence alone. The soul lost itself in the Self, and all idea of duality, of subject and object, was effaced. Limitations were gone, and finite space was one with infinite space. Beyond speech, beyond experience and beyond thought, Ramakrishna had realised the Brahman—had become the Brahman.35

Tota Puri left Dakshineswar after eleven months.

Here, an issue worth mentioning is the relationship of Ramakrishna with his gurus. The traditional biographers are pertinent in their assertion that Ramakrishna was not an ordinary disciple of his gurus; rather he would often help them broaden their vision in spiritual matters. He used to have some arguments with Tota Puri. The latter, a typical *Janani* (follower of the path of knowledge to God), was inclined towards absoluteness of God while Ramakrishna never surrendered the devotional character of his personality. For Ramakrishna, the energetic aspect, which he refers to as Mother, was inseparable from the Brahman, the Absolute.36 On the other hand, Bhairavi Brahmani, who was still living at the temple complex, was not happy at Ramakrishna’s indulgence in Vedanta under the supervision of Tota Puri. The traditional biographers maintain here that “[t]hough she was highly advanced

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36 Ibid., 232.
spiritually, she had not yet attained perfection.” She also did not like Ramakrishna’s closeness to his wife as she feared it could be dangerous for his celibacy. However, Ramakrishna did not pay heed to her advice and consequentially she disregarded him for some time. After having a quarrel with one of Ramakrishna’s female relative she left Dakshineswar after staying there for six years. On the differences between Ramakrishna and his gurus, traditional biographers do not hesitate in regarding his gurus as spiritually imperfect or even being under the sway of passions like anger and base desires like egoism.

God-Realisation through other Religions

It is claimed that as a result of Advaita Vedanta realisation, Ramakrishna’s “mind acquired the power to accommodate [sic.] itself to the plane of relativity as well as to that of transcendentalism . . . a wonderful breadth, accepting all forms of religion as so many ways to reaching perfection.” It is said that to practically demonstrate this fact, he converted to Islam and Christianity, though for a brief time in each case, to realise God through those religions. So goes the story. Aman named Govinda Rai (in some sources his name is spelled as ‘Govinda Ray’) came to Dakshineswar in 1866. He was originally a Kshatriya Hindu but had embraced Islam attracted by its appeal of universal brotherhood. Rani Rasmani was hospitable to everyone and so was to Govinda Rai who found the temple garden of Dakshineswar congenial for his spiritual practices as he probably followed the path of Sufis. Ramakrishna was impressed by his devotion to God and decided to be initiated by him.

For three days, he adopted the Muslim ways of worship and clothing. He used to repeat the name of Allah, and say prayers regularly in these days. His nephew Hariday reports that during these days Ramakrishna wanted to eat Muslim food, which includes meat, but upon intense insistence of Mathur he desisted from it. However, Mathur managed to arrange a Brahmin, who, under the directions of a Muslim cook, would prepare some Muslim style dishes for him. During the practice of Islam, he never entered into the temple and lived at Mathur’s quarters which were out of the temple compound. He narrates about his practice during those days in the following words:

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37 Ibid., 242.
38 Ibid., 242–44.
39 See Ibid., 226, 243.
40 Ibid., 236.
42 Advaita Ashrama, Life of Sri Ramakrishna, 237–38.
43 Ibid., 238.
I devoutly repeated the name of Allah, wore a cloth like the Arab Moslems, said their prayers five times daily and felt disinclined even to see images of the Hindu gods and goddesses, much less worship them— for the Hindu way of thinking had disappeared altogether from my mind.  

After three days, he “saw a radiant Person with long beard and of grave appearance, and his mind passing through the realisation of Brahman with attributes, was finally absorbed in the Brahman without attributes.”

According to Stark, the basis of Ramakrishna’s liberality was his knowledge of unity which enabled him to see God in all existence. Resultantly, he had love for God as well as love for man. This is how he could embrace Islam and the Muslim community. Though, he practiced Islam for only three days, that spiritual experience left lasting imprints on his personality. He used to have Muslim disciples and venerate the worship of Allah in diverse ways.

It may also be added that he always would mention the Prophet of Islam appreciatively.

Seven years later, he is said to have gone through an experience of Christianity akin to the case of Islam. Ramakrishna’s introduction to Christianity was materialised through Sambhu Charan Malik, who had a garden close to the Kali’s temple. He held high esteem for Ramakrishna and as a generous person used to take care of Ramakrishna’s needs after the death of Mathur. He was acquainted with scriptures of different religions including the Bible that he was in the habit of reading to Ramakrishna during their meetings. This aroused curiosity in Ramakrishna and he yearned to realise the Divine Mother through Christianity.

It was sometime in 1874, while he was looking at the paintings of Mary and Christ hanging on the walls in the house of one of his devotees named Jadulal Mallick, when he felt that his Hindu ideas were replaced by the Christian ones and he went through an experience which has been described in the following words:

[H]e felt as though the picture had become animated, and that rays of light were emanating from the figures of Mary and Christ and entering into him, altogether changing his mental outlook. When he realized that his Hindu ideas were being pushed into a corner by this onrush of new ones, he tried his best to stop them and eagerly prayed to the Divine Mother, ‘What is it that Thou art doing to me,

44 Christopher Isherwood, *Ramakrishna and His Disciples* (London: Methuen, 1965), 124.
46 Stark, *God of All*, 78–79.
47 Advaita Ashrama, *Life of Sri Ramakrishna*, 286.
Mother? But in vain. His love and regard for the Hindu gods were swept away by this tidal wave, and in their stead a deep regard for Christ and the Christian church filled his heart and opened to his eyes the vision of Christian devotees burning incense and candles before the figure of Jesus in the churches and offering unto him the eager outpourings of their hearts.\^\footnote{Tejasananda, *A Short Life of Sri Ramakrishna*, 64.}

After returning to the temple he remained in that state for three days during which he did not pay visit to Kali. Then, on the fourth day as he was walking in the compound of the temple complex

\[H\]e saw an extraordinary-looking person of serene aspect approaching him with his gaze intently fixed on him . . . the figure drew near, and from the inmost recesses of Sri Ramakrishna’s heart there went up the note, ‘This is the Christ who poured out his heart’s blood for the redemption of mankind and suffered agonies for its sake.’ . . . Then the Son of Man embraced Sri Ramakrishna and became merged in him. The Master lost outward consciousness in Samadhi, realising his union with the Brahman with attributes. After some time he came back to the normal plane.\^\footnote{Advaita Ashrama, *Life of Sri Ramakrishna*, 288–89.}

After that experience, he became convinced that the Christ was an incarnation of the Lord. It is interesting to note that in this experience he did not ascend above the level of Brahman with attributes, unlike the case of his experience through Islam, in which he claimed to have realised Absolute Impersonal God, ultimately. According to Müller, all his visions of God in different forms and persons were peculiar in that “he always saw them outside himself, but when they vanished they seemed to have entered into him. This was true of Rama, of Siva, of Kali, of Krishna, of Jesus, and of every other god or goddess or prophet.\^\footnote{Müller, *Ramakrishna: His Life and Sayings*, 51.}

**What is God-Realisation according to Ramakrishna?**

Now, it seems appropriate to throw light on what exactly Ramakrishna believes about God and God realisation. According to him, when Godhead is thought as beyond the three gunas,\footnote{Guna literally means quality. The three gunas believed to be present in all beings in various proportions are *tamas*: darkness, *rajas*: activity, and *sattva*: purity and being-ness. See Swami Narayananda, *The Primal Power in Man or the Kandalini Shakti* (Rishikesh: N. K. Prasad, 1950), 11–18.} then it is called the Attribute-less Reality, *Nirguna* Brahman. This is the Supreme Brahman, *Parabrahman*, beyond
speech and thought, the Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute. He is the One, nothing exists except Him, all else is unreal, just illusion. What God exactly is, cannot be described because upon knowing Him, one loses his or her individuality. Then, who would be there to describe Him? Ramakrishna does not reject the possibility of realising the Absolute, as he says that: “In Samadhi one attains the knowledge of Brahman, one realizes Brahman.” But he rejects the possibility of description: “Man goes into samadhi what he feels there cannot be described in words.” Even the scriptures are not ultimate authority in this connection. In his words:

All things in the world—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.

To elaborate the above point, he gives the example of a salt doll that went to measure the depth of the ocean; no sooner did it enter the ocean than it melted and lost its identity. He also gives the example of sun and its reflections in many pots filled with water. If all pots were broken except one, there would be only one reflection. And if this last pot is also broken, there would be no reflection and what remains cannot be described. How will you know there is real sun unless there is a reflection?

According to him, it is possible for a man to see the forms of God, or to think of Him as a Person, only so long as he is conscious that he is a devotee. Ramakrishna further explains that “On account of distance the sun appears to be small, . . . the water of a lake blue and the sky also appears blue. Go near and you will see that it has no colour at all. Therefore, I say that in the height of Vedanta reasoning Brahman has no attributes.” He further states:

As water when congealed becomes ice, so the visible form of the Almighty is the materialized manifestation of the all-pervading formless Brahman. It may be

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53 Ibid., 150.
54 Ibid., 148, 218, 482.
55 Ibid., 103.
59 Ibid., 777.
60 Ibid., 150.
61 Ibid., 150.
called; in fact, Sat-cbid-ananda solidified as the ice, being part and parcel of the water, remains in the water for a time and afterwards melts in it, so the Personal God is part and parcel of the Impersonal. He rises from the Impersonal, remains there, and ultimately merges into it and disappears.62

About the realisation of God, Ramakrishna says: “The perfect knowledge makes the ‘I’ melt in the ocean of Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute.”63 The jīva (individual soul) goes beyond the realm of Maya and becomes united with the Supreme Soul, and the aspirant’s mind merges in Brahman.64 Once asked, when shall I be free? Ramakrishna answered, “when the I hood (egoism) will vanish, and the self will be merged in the Divinity.”65 Thus, by losing one’s individuality, one cannot preserve one’s body. After attaining brahmajnāna (knowledge of Brahman) the body drops off in twenty one days.66 This state of Brahmajnana is impossible to attain without samadhi: a state of super consciousness attained as the final goal through the spiritual discipline.67 In this state, the mind is annihilated, that is to say, stops functioning and the aspirant becomes one with God.68 Once a boat enters the ‘black waters’ of the ocean it does not return. Nobody knows what happens to the boat after that. Therefore, the boat, so to speak, cannot give us any information about the ocean.69 Just as the Brahman is said to be beyond being and non-being, when the aspirant realises this highest reality he attains a state which is something between asti, is, and nasti, is-not.70 He transcends both the knowledge and ignorance and becomes free from all duality.71 All reasoning, arguments, and discussions cease, and he understands the mysteries of God with clear perception.72

Then, Ramakrishna says: “some ordinary men attain Samadhi through spiritual discipline; but they do not come back. But when God Himself is born as a man, as an incarnation, then for the welfare of humanity the incarnation returns from samadhi to consciousness of the world.”73 Not only the incarnations, some other devotees, too, desire to witness the līla (play) of

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62 Ibid., 148, 91, 859; Müller, Ramakrishna: His Life and Sayings, 106.
63 Gupta, The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, 148; Müller, Ramakrishna: His Life and Sayings, 145.
64 See Gupta, The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, 245; Müller, Ramakrishna: His Life and Sayings, 141.
65 Ibid., 144.
66 Gupta, The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, 354.
67 Ibid., 767.
68 Ibid., 170, 767.
69 Ibid., 170, 777.
70 Ibid., 148.
71 Max Müller, Ramakrishna: His Life and Sayings, 176.
72 Ibid., 115.
73 Gupta, The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, 152, 237.
God and to teach others. Therefore, God keeps a little ‘I’ in them even after the knowledge of Brahman, so that they enjoy the play of God. Hence, the body survives with much devotees.\(^7^4\) However, who has attained God, keeps only an appearance of ego and such trace of ego does not cause rebirth.\(^7^5\) That is why he says: “when a man realizes one of the following states he becomes perfect —(1) all this am I; (2) all this art thou; (3) thou the Master, and I the servant.”\(^7^6\) But he also says that from the standpoint of discrimination the ‘ego of devotee’ keeps the aspirant a little away from God.\(^7^7\) It is also important to note that the love of God and His devotion is related with life. When one passes away after attaining the state of divine love and communion, he will not take rebirth, which, ultimately, would lead to his union with Brahman.

Finally, he proclaims that when a man has really seen a deity, he comes to know that all the deities are manifestations of one and the same Brahman.\(^7^8\) He gives an example of fire, which has no definite shape, but in glowing emblems it assumes certain forms. Likewise, the formless God sometimes invests Himself with definite forms.\(^7^9\) In the same way, after giving the example of a chameleon and its changing colours he explains: “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.”\(^8^0\)

No doubt, his doctrines about religion, nature of Godhead, transcendence and immanence of God, limits of humans regarding knowledge about God and spiritual realisation of God are profound theologically and philosophically. However, a thorough debate on the plausibility of all of these positions is out of the scope of the present paper. The above analysis was aimed at clarifying the point that Ramakrishna’s concepts of God and God realisation are related to his notion of validity of multiple religions at the same time.

**Critical Analysis of Ramakrishna’s Religious Experiences**

As it has been stated above, most of the notions that Ramakrishna propounded were already latent in the Hindu tradition. What makes Ramakrishna unique is that he based his proclamation of the truth in all religions on his personal religious experiences related to different traditions.

\(^7^4\) Ibid., 103, 53, 452, 77, 79.
\(^7^5\) Ibid., 71, 135.
\(^7^6\) Müller, *Ramakrishna: His Life and Sayings*, 140, 05, 29.
\(^7^7\) Gupta, *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, 150.
\(^7^8\) Müller, *Ramakrishna: His Life and Sayings*, 130, 31.
\(^7^9\) Ibid., 172.
\(^8^0\) Gupta, *The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, 150, 75.
within Hinduism as well as other religions like Islam and Christianity.\textsuperscript{81} Therefore, a critical scrutiny of these experiences seems in order.

First of all, questions have been raised about his visions or religious experiences by several independent scholars, some of his notable contemporaries, and occasionally even by his own followers and devotees. One is just reminded that during a phase of his experiences he demonstrated strange behaviour and that Mathur, who had been taking care of him at Dakshineswar, took him to the physicians in Calcutta for the treatment of his madness.\textsuperscript{82} The consensus of his employers and acquaintances was that he had become insane.\textsuperscript{83} Even, his foremost disciple Vivekananda casted doubts on his visions repeatedly. Once, he said to him: “The forms of God that you see are the fiction of your mind.”\textsuperscript{84} Haladhari, another fellow of his at Dakshineswar temple, “cast suspicions on the truth of Sri Ramakrishna’s God visions and said on the authority of the scriptures that God is beyond the reach of the human mind.”\textsuperscript{85} Pundit Shivanath, who was his admirer and closely intimated with him, viewed about his ‘transcendental state’, or loss of outward consciousness in \textit{Samadhi}, that it was only the outcome of “a strange nervous disorder, under which whenever there was any strong emotion or excitement he would faint, losing consciousness, while his whole countenance assumed a radiant glow, as a sign of the emotion working within.”\textsuperscript{86} Some Brahmo Samaj\textsuperscript{87} leaders at that time also described his \textit{Samadhi} as a nervous malady.\textsuperscript{88} It should be born in mind that these people were not his opponents but sympathetic fellowmen or disciples.

Secondly, it is quite important to note that occasionally he himself doubted the truth of his visions and spiritual experiences.\textsuperscript{89} Once he said: “It was not love of God that made me absorbed in God and indifferent to external life. I became positively insane for some time. The \textit{sadhus} who frequented this temple told me to practice many things. I tried to follow them, and the consequence was that my austerities drove me to insanity.”\textsuperscript{90} Another fact that vindicates Ramakrishna’s confession of being abnormal, though for some

\begin{footnotes}
\footnote{Stark, \textit{God of All}, 207.}
\footnote{Müller, \textit{Ramakrishna: His Life and Sayings}, 39.}
\footnote{Sudhir Kakar, \textit{The Analyst and the Mystic: Psychoanalytic Reflections on Religion and Mysticism} (New Delhi: Viking, 1991), 15.}
\footnote{Advaita Ashrama, \textit{Life of Sri Ramakrishna}, 384; Gupta, \textit{The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna}, 772.}
\footnote{Advaita Ashrama, \textit{Life of Sri Ramakrishna}, 109.}
\footnote{Ibid., 16–17.}
\footnote{A nineteenth century religious movement in Bengal started by Ram Mohan Roy (1772–1833).}
\footnote{Gupta, \textit{The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna}, 44.}
\footnote{Advaita Ashrama, \textit{Life of Sri Ramakrishna}, 109; Müller, \textit{Ramakrishna: His Life and Sayings}, 39.}
\footnote{Advaita Ashrama, \textit{Life of Sri Ramakrishna}, 319; Müller, \textit{Ramakrishna: His Life and Sayings}, 44.}
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time, is the case of Harish. He came to the Dakshineswar temple, where after a few days’ stay, his brain was deranged, probably because of severe ascetic practices carried out there. The sympathetic biographers, however, would pay little heed to Ramakrishna’s own confession.

Müller has observed that some sanyasis inflict on themselves ascetic methods by which they try to subdue and annihilate their passions, and bring themselves to a state of extreme nervous exaltation accompanied by trances or fainting fits of long duration. Such sentimentalism, a kind of self-hypnotism, was also noticed in some of Ramakrishna’s devotees during his last days. They began to cultivate the art of shedding tears, shaking the body, contorting the face and going into trances, attempting thereby to imitate Ramakrishna. Vivekananda, at that time, ascribed these manifestations to malnutrition, mental weakness and nervous debility. And when Ramakrishna induced Samadhi in Vivekananda by a touch, the latter suspected if it was a kind of hypnotism or mesmerism, as many scholars had considered such demonstrations a form of hypnotism. But when somebody suggested before Vivekananda, during his lecture at Harvard University, that seeing everything unreal by annihilation of mind was a kind of self-hypnotism, he argumentatively said that “every other religion that preaches these things as real is practicing a form of hypnotism.” Clearly, this answer is against the common experience. Perhaps, it was graveness of the objection that made Vivekananda repulsive, as it directly hits at the very basis of Vedanta philosophy and the claims of practical realisation of various forms of God.

It is not intended here to explain away all of Ramakrishna’s experiences as mere hallucinations or psychic disorder. There is no denying of the fact that his talks on serious religious matters, during his later career, are full of insights, subtle nuances, and profound wisdom. Hence, Narasingha P. Sil views that though Ramakrishna was famous as Pagal Thakur (mad master), his madness did not pertain to mental derangement rather it was divine madness that was associated with mystics who were intoxicated with the love of God. In a similar vein, Romain Rolland points out: “There is no difficulty in

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91 Advaita Ashrama, *Life of Sri Ramakrishna*, 646.
92 Müller, *Ramakrishna: His Life and Sayings*, VI.
95 See for example, Farquhar, *Modern Religious Movements in India*, 189; Müller, *Ramakrishna: His Life and Sayings*, 38.
proving the apparent destruction of his whole mental structure, and the disintegration of its elements. But how were they reassembled into a synthetic entity of the highest order? Similarly, Müller says that the difficulty about the case of Ramakrishna that needs to be solved is the fact that he “had never received a proper classical education, and yet spoke with authority about the ancient literature and religion of his countrymen.” All in all, it is concluded that it is also quite probable that he was not in his right mind for a certain period of his life and there may be a phase of hallucination in his visions, but his insightful conversations are ample proof that his personality was not disintegrated as a whole. This conclusion is also supported by the psychoanalyst Sudhir Kakar, who maintains that Ramakrishna did pass through a phase of insanity and hallucination committing acts like worshipping his own phallus as that of Siva and thinking to have ecstatic visions while he defecated. In his later life, he himself would wonder what he had been doing. These visions were less divine intoxication than human disintegration. However, Kakar sees this phase of insanity as a prelude to the sober religious experiences and to preparation to see the world with a creative eye, a state where Buddha, Freud, and Ramakrishna come together.

In fact, Ramakrishna’s life and religious experiences have been interpreted variously. His most popular image is that of a Vedantist which has been articulately construed and successfully projected by his disciples like Vivekananda. Certainly, many of his thoughts strike a chord with Vedanta philosophy. Nevertheless, one of the Brahmo leaders Pratap Chander Mozoomdar (1840–1905) says on this point that “Ramakrishna was not in the least a Vedantist, except that every Hindu unconsciously imbibes from the atmosphere around some amount of Vedantism, which is the philosophical backbone of every national cult.” Construing Ramakrishna as a Vedantist has been challenged by some contemporary scholars as well. For instance, on the basis of some hitherto neglected sources in Bengali language, Jeffery J. Kripal views that “Tantra, not the Vedanta, structures the saint’s ecstasies, visions, and teachings.” According to Kripal, Ramakrishna suffered from suppressed homosexuality. He bases his thesis on certain psychological features of Ramakrishna’s personality and some elements of his ecstasies, like

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99 Müller, Ramakrishna: His Life and Sayings, 60.
100 Kakar, The Analyst and the Mystic, 15.
101 Ibid., 15, 35.
102 Müller, Ramakrishna: His Life and Sayings, 62.
unconsciously putting his foot on the genitals of his young devotees during trances. In his words, Ramakrishna “could not complete the Tantric ritual of maithuna or ‘sexual intercourse’ with a woman, for example, not because he had somehow transceded sex (the traditional claim) but because the ritual’s heterosexual assumptions seriously violated structure of his own homosexual desires.”

Understandably, Kripal’s stance invoked strong rebuttals from Indian scholars in general and followers of Ramakrishna in particular. On the other hand, Sil maintains that Ramakrishna was primarily a Bhakta of Chaitanyite branch of Vaishnavism. In this tradition, love of God culminates in five bhavas, one of which is madhura, the attitude of a girl to her lover, which is sometimes mistakenly related to Tantra.

Another important question remains to be answered. What exactly did Ramakrishna propound as something novel? According to The Hutchinson Encyclopaedia of Living Faiths whatever Ramakrishna said was actually echoing of all the previous religious thought of India, but his views sounded novel because he was good at homely phrase. Even, the idea of multiplicity of various paths leading to God is not something which Ramakrishna presented for the first time. In 1868, during a visit to the holy cities of Banaras, Mathura and Vrindavan, he had met Trailinga Swami, the then celebrated Hindu spiritual figure. The latter told him in reply to a question that “god is one when seen in state of Samadhi but when looked at through the prism of relative consciousness, He is many.” This quotation indicates that Ramakrishna was not alone in presenting the idea of different but equally valid perceptions of Godhead. In the words of Lokeswarananda: “Sri Ramakrishna’s message of the harmony of religions was not new. Hindus have often heard the verse from the Rig-Veda: ‘Truth is one, sages call it by various names.’ But most people had not applied this truth; it was Sri Ramakrishna who revived this truth and placed it clearly before us.” For Müller, his spiritual insights were the result of his intellect and practical observation about his own tradition.

Closely related to the issue of his religious experiences is the case of his conversions to Islam and Christianity. His claim is that: “I have practiced all

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104 Ibid.
105 This devotional school is ascribed to Chaitanya Mahaprabhu (1486–1534) of Bengal.
109 Advaita Ashrama, Life of Sri Ramakrishna, 257–58.
110 Lokeswarananda, The Way to God, 344.
111 See Müller, Ramakrishna: His Life and Sayings, 62.
religions, Hinduism, Islam, Christianity and I have followed the paths of different Hindu sects... I have found that it is the same God towards whom all are directing their steps, though along different paths.”

Nevertheless, there are some problems about this claim. First of all, to embrace a new religion always accompanies certain changes in belief, practice, and identity, but in the case of Ramakrishna some of these elements are missing. For example, to be a Muslim or Christian is not a matter of experiment for three or four days, it entails acceptance of a particular worldview and making a solemn pledge for lifetime. Then, the circumstances under which he supposedly embraced Christianity and Islam raise questions. In the case of Islam, he was impressed by Govinda Rai, who was originally a Hindu and said to have converted to Islam but still staying at the Hindu temple complex of Dakshineswar for spiritual practice. Though it is reported that the temple was built on a plot which was a Muslim cemetery before, his stay at a Hindu temple for spiritual practice seems quite strange and unusual. His Hindu name (‘Govinda’ is an appellation of Krishna) also puts a question mark on Govinda Rai’s conversion to Islam. In South Asia, often conversion from a religion to another one is accompanied with change of the personal name. According to Swami Saradananda, it is unclear how far Govinda followed Islamic social manners and practices. These issues make one legitimately suspect whether that man really had embraced Islam or he was simply “attracted” to it? As far as his conversion to Christianity is concerned Ramakrishna never came in direct contact with any Christian.

Besides, his spiritual experience in the case of Islam is that he “saw a radiant person with long beard and of grave appearance, and his mind passing through the realization of Brahman with attributes was finally absorbed in the Brahman without attributes.” Here, Stark presents a threefold analysis of Ramakrishna’s “Islamic realisation” saying: “It will be noted that a distinctive characteristic of Sri Ramakrishna’s Islamic religious experiment was that in it he had the three different types of mystical experiences: personal with form, personal without form, and impersonal.” Then, Stark speculates whether the radiant person with long beard and grave appearance was the Prophet Muhammad (peace be on him) himself, one of his companions, or some Sufi saint who had retained his individual identity from Allah in a subtle body to

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112 Nirvedananda, “Sri Ramakrishna and Spiritual Renaissance,” 683.
113 Advaita Ashrama, Life of Sri Ramakrishna, 60.
115 Advaita Ashrama, Life of Sri Ramakrishna, 60; cf. Tejasananda, A Short Life of Sri Ramakrishna, 63.
116 Stark, God of All, 75.
work salvation of others like the bodhisattvas in Buddhism.\textsuperscript{117} From the Muslim theological point of view, however, viewing any being other than Allah as some form of God nullifies the very edifice of Islamic creed of \textit{tawḥīd} (oneness of God). Then, he explicates the second aspect of Ramakrishna’s vision according to which God is formless but still with names, attributes and qualifications and says that it “is this aspect of God that is predominantly worshipped among Muslims.”\textsuperscript{118} Again, this rendering of the Islamic creed is quite problematic. God is believed to be beyond human speculations in Muslim theology. Therefore, concepts like personal and impersonal God do not fit in it squarely.

Lastly, Stark relates the third aspect of Ramakrishna’s vision in which his mind was “absorbed in Brahman without attributes,” to the Sufi experience of \textit{anā ī-ḥaqq} (I am the Truth). He says that when losing his distinct identity and being unable to see any existence other than God, the Sufi says ‘I am the Truth’ in fact he is saying ‘I am naught,’ only God is real.\textsuperscript{119} This interpretation seems negotiable vis-à-vis certain Sufi traditions. Thus, I. H. Azad Faruqi draws parallels between Rumi and Ramakrishna on the themes like love of God and universality of religious truth.\textsuperscript{120} Still, from the point of view of the mainstream Muslim theology and Sufi traditions, the problem here is that the Hindu view of possibility of man’s mergence with God has been endorsed which is hardly in consonance with the essential Islamic worldview.

Perhaps in keeping with such observations, Yaqub Masih opines that Ramakrishna’s conversion to Islam or Christianity must not be taken seriously. These were not cases of genuine conversion.\textsuperscript{121} Similarly Smith observes:

The question of Ramakrishna’s involvement in other religious traditions is certainly not without its attendant problems and considerations . . . to do justice to the Islamic perspective one must come to terms with the fact that by his own admission Ramakrishna could never affirm the Muslim creed, which says that there is no God but Allah. His failure to this would mean that from the Muslim point of view he had never really participated in the Islamic experience, that he was not a Muslim and could not be one without witnessing to that most basic of creedal formulations. In the Christian case one can raise questions concerning Ramakrishna’s understanding, among other things, of the suffering of Christ.\textsuperscript{122}

\textsuperscript{117} Ibid., 75.
\textsuperscript{118} Ibid., 75–76.
\textsuperscript{119} Ibid., 76–77.
\textsuperscript{120} See I. H. Azad Faruqi, \textit{Sufism and Bhakti}, 152–57.
\textsuperscript{122} Stark, \textit{God of All}, 188, 89.
Some of these problems about Ramakrishna’s conversions have been recognised by Stark. However, he thinks that such objections are legitimatised by theology, by scripture and by the authority of the church, and therefore, they cannot refute Ramakrishna’s experience. One has to go through the very experiences that Ramakrishna had, only then one can say anything negative or positive about it.\(^{123}\) The simplistic nature of Stark’s argument becomes obvious as it can be easily reverted. That is to say, one would have to realise God through different religions just like Ramakrishna supposedly did in order to accept all of them as valid paths leading to the same destination. Actually, here Stark fails to differentiate between the idea and feeling, both involved in mystical experience. A Muslim scholar Burhan Ahmad Faruqi explains this point in the preface of his book *The Mujaddid’s Conception of Tawhid*. He views that mystical experience has two aspects: feeling and idea. The feeling is subjective and private possession of the mystic but the ideas expressed in its description are objective and liable to scholarly scrutiny and critical evaluation.\(^{124}\)

As a matter of fact, the claims of Ramakrishna’s God-realisation through Islam or Christianity appear like imposing a Hindu view of religion and God on these religions. The following statement of Tejasananda vindicates the above contention. “The very fact that he practised Islam after attaining perfection in the Advaita makes it clear that only through this—the underlying basis of all faiths—can the Hindus and Mohammedans be united with each other.”\(^{125}\) The same position has been advocated by the biographers of Ramakrishna in more clear terms in the following quotation: “He realised the goal of life by following ancient Hindu methods. He was a Hindu of Hindus.”\(^{126}\) These quotations demonstrate the Hindu content and context of Ramakrishna’s religious experiences. Similar conclusion has been drawn by Sofie Hauch who maintains that notwithstanding the claims of access to the ultimate truth, theories of religious pluralism presented by people like Ramakrishna, Vivekananda Helena P. Blavatsky (1831-1891), and Annie Basant (1847-1933) in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were “contingent notions that can only be understood through an analysis of their larger context and their own relation to the intellectual environment in which they were formed and grew.”\(^{127}\)

\(^{123}\) Ibid., 83–84.
\(^{124}\) Burhan Ahmad Faruqi, *The Mujaddid’s Conception of Tawhid* (Lahore: Institute of Islamic Culture, 1989), IV–V.
\(^{125}\) Tejasananda, *A Short Life of Sri Ramakrishna*, 63.
\(^{126}\) Advaita Ashrama, *Life of Sri Ramakrishna*, 326.
\(^{127}\) Sofie Hauch, “Reassessing Religious Experience in a Scientific Age: Early Approaches to Religious Pluralism” (PhD diss., University of Glasgow: 2013), 212.
In fact, endorsement of religious experiences or visions of mystics ultimately boils down to having faith in them. Normally, people tend to consider such experiences as genuine when the claimant belongs to their own religious tradition. Otherwise, such claims are simply ignored or explained away in naturalistic terms as hallucinations, hypnotism, auto suggestions, and so on. Now, although Ramakrishna made claims of practical God-realisation through multiple religious traditions his religious experiences seem to be embedded in the Hindu tradition in such a way that they have limited meaningfulness for followers of the other religious traditions. Therefore, Ramakrishna’s religious experiences can be a plausible premise of religious pluralism for his followers but not necessarily for the others.

Conclusion

The above survey reveals that certain problems are associated with Ramakrishna’s religious experiences according to neutral academicians as well as his coreligionist and sympathetic biographers. Though, he seems to have gone through a phase of mental malady, in the later stage of his religious career he definitely emerges as an insightful spiritual personality. However, whatever he said as a result of his visions and religious experiences was already present in the Hindu tradition overtly or latently. In his spiritual experiments with non-Hindu religions, he hardly moved away from the essential Hindu positions. Thus, without necessarily discarding the subjective dimension of Ramakrishna’s religious experiences, it is concluded that his views articulated in human language after these experiences are subject to conceptual analysis like any other philosophical proposition or theological dogma.

Also, the claims about Ramakrishna’s conversion to non-Hindu religions and God-realisation through them seems dubious from the point of view of the religious traditions concerned. Speaking specifically about the case of Islam, if a person does not bear witness that there is no god but Allah and that Muḥammad (peace be on him) is His messenger, he or she cannot be considered to have become Muslim. Similarly, an anthropomorphic vision of God as ‘a person of grave appearance with long beard’ simply contradicts the very basic concept of God in Islam.

It goes without saying, however, that Ramakrishna’s claim of practical God-realisation through different religions is accepted as genuine by his followers. Having such belief can definitively infuse in them a tolerant attitude towards different religions. To that extent Ramakrishna’s religious experiences can certainly be a source for peaceful coexistence and interreligious harmony.

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