

ICPR NATIONAL SEMINAR ON
“SRI RAMAKRISHNA KATHAMRITA”,

Indian Council of Philosophical Research (ICPR) has decided to organize a 3-day National Seminar on “Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita”. The seminar will be held at India International Centre, New Delhi. The tentative dates will be during 21-23 February, 2018.

Those interested are invited to present well researched learned papers on a suitable topic relating to the theme as indicated in the enclosed theme note and submit the same to the undersigned latest by 31 January, 2018.

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**THREE DAY NATIONAL SEMINAR
ON
SRI RAMAKRISHNA KATHĀMRITA**

(Theme Note)

Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita or The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna is a recorded conversation of Sri Ramakrishna (1836-1886 AD) – a spiritual Master of Bengal – with his disciples, devotees and visitors. Mahendranath Gupta, an intimate disciple of Sri Ramakrishna under the pseudonym of “M”, recorded in writing the Master’s day-to-day life along with his spiritual conversation with almost stenographic accuracy from February 1882 to April 1886, which is partially reminiscent of Socrates’ dialogue with his disciples, each of which conversations was recorded by their intimate disciples, namely, Mahendranath Gupta and Plato respectively. The contents of these conversations were deeply mystical in nature in the sense that these sayings described the inner spiritual experiences of Sri Ramakrishna. As a close disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, Mahendranath Gupta has brought out in his recording the thought-provoking deeper dimension of the simple and intimate

utterances of the great prophet in the light of ancient scriptures of India especially the Vedanta. He used to explain the difficult themes of ancient *Sastras*, particularly the Vedanta, in simple terms with the help of homely parables and illustrations to his audiences who were comprised of his contemporary stalwarts like Iswarchandra Vidyasagar, Keshab Chandra Sen, Girish Chandra Ghosh as well as his large number of disciples both literate and illiterate. The utterances of Sri Ramakrishna were in no way the product of his intellectual cognition as he himself was said to be illiterate; they were rooted in his direct *spiritual experience*..

Sri Ramakrishna's teachings based as they are on the strength of his indubitable spiritual experiences and firm conviction were largely on metaphysical and religious issues like Brahman, God, self, world, Avatar or incarnation, religion, the end of human life and his views on these issues uniquely differed even from the Vedantins, like Sankara and Ramanuja, with whom he maintained a close proximity to them while expressing his views on the above-mentioned issues. Apart from his views on deep philosophical issues that are mentioned above, his instructions to his followers on various issues relating to their practical spiritual life are significantly relevant even today and deserve our reflection. He never seems to make any conscious effort to build the philosophical systems like those of Sankara and Ramanuja, but his views expressed in the layman's terms point to the architecture of a school of philosophy which has been designated by later scholars as Neo-vedantism. Besides being deeply philosophic in his utterances his role as a public educator on spirituality and religion has come to be widely acclaimed all around.

It would be relevant to outline some of his salient views on core philosophical issues that are relevant even today and deserve our serious reflections.

(i) According to Sri Ramakrishna, Brahman and Śakti or Kālī are non-different and are the same reality. The former is called Brahman when it is in its static being or in the state of inactivity and the latter is called God when it is in the state of its sportive creative activity. This implies that Brahman or the Absolute which is without form and Kali or God who is with form are the same identical reality in two different *states* and both are equally true. While in conversation with the writer of *Sri Ramakrishna Kathāmrita*, he said: "Remember that God with form is just as true as God without form". Further, Brahman in its essential nature (*svarupa*) or immutable being (*nitya-rūpa*) is indeterminate and impersonal (*nirguna* and *nirvisesa*), while in its sportive creative

activity (*lila-rupa*), it is personal God (*saguna* and *savisesa*) or the Divine Mother. And he also points out that we cannot conceive *nitya-rupa* apart from her *lila-rūpa* and vice versa, just as we cannot think of light apart from its relation to and different from darkness.

(ii) The Upanishadic dictum: “All this is Brahman” (“*Sarvam Khalbidaṁ Brahman*”), for him, means that all *are* existent and are Brahman in different forms. Brahman as *Śaktī*, for him, has become the individual souls, the world and the twenty-four principles from *Prakrti* down to the physical elements. He says that “the earth and the heaven, the sun and the moon, the temple and the garden, the jar and the pot, the bed and the bedstead, man and woman, the young and the old, birds and beasts, in a word, all are verily so many forms and manifestations of the Divine Mother, all are Brahman and beam with the effulgence of the Divine *cit* or consciousness”.

(iii) For Sri Ramakrishna, Brahman, Atman and Bhagavān are different names of the same reality. He, who is *jnani* or the man of philosophic insight, aspires for Brahman; he who is *yogin* meditates for Atman and he who is *bhakta* or the humble man of devotion, warships Bhagavān. “Just as the same water of the ocean”, says Sri Ramakrishna, “is congealed into the form of ice by extreme cold and is dissolved into formless water by the heat of the sun, so reality takes on form and shape for the devotee but is formless for the *jnani* and the *yogi*. He who is Brahman is Atman, He is also Bhagavān”.

(iv) While talking to his devotees, he often used to say that God or the Divine Mother is like a wish-fulfilling tree (*kalpataru*). All sorts of people come to it and pray for all kind of things, good as well as bad, and each gets the thing or things desired by him. Sri Ramakrishna says: “As you seek so you receive; God is *kalpataru*; one receives from Him just what one wants from”. Thus, for Sri Ramakrishna, Reality is responsive to human interests and endeavours, to man’s efforts to realize the ends of his life.

(v) Sri Ramakrishna has a definite perspective to look at this world in which we live. For him, the world with all its wonderful objects is the sportive creative activity (*lila*) of Brahman, and not the play of *māyā*; it has *real* existence. Brahman as the Divine Mother is manifest in the world. So everything in the world – earth, plants, trees, birds, man – is a form of the Divine Mother and is therefore, real and conscious. But the world has only a reality that is relative to the sportive creative activity (*lila*) of Brahman; it has no permanence and eternal reality like Brahman. When the creative activity of Brahman ceases, there is no being, and no world at all. So also, in the state of Samadhi, the whole

world with all its objects and even the ego of man ceases to exist. Only Brahman in its pure, eternal and immutable being abides and shines as a self-luminous light. “Just as in a magical performance”, he says, “the magician is real and the magical show is unreal, so God alone is *sat* or real (in the sense of being eternal) and the world is a *sat* or unreal (in the sense of being non-eternal)”.

(vi) If one goes through his parables with a reflective mood, one would also find in him a view of the ego and the self expressed in laymen’s terms. Generally, “ego” is understood as the “I” which thinks of other things, strives for certain ends and becomes happy to get them, feels sorry to miss them. It is the knower (*Jnātā*), the doer (*kartā*) and the enjoyer and sufferer (*bhoktā*). But when we search for it, we fail to get something like this. What we always say is “my body”, “my mind” etc., and not “me”. “Just as when we peel off the skin of an onion, one after another”, says Sri Ramakrishna, “all goes out and nothing remains, so when we critically examine the ‘I’, we get none; what is left at last is pure consciousness, and that is the self”. Philosophically speaking, what we call the ego or “I” is like the body, mind, etc., an object of consciousness and *not* the abiding subject of consciousness to which they are all objects.

(vii) Sri Ramakrishna lived in an age in which the world was torn by conflicts of creeds and cultures, dogmas and doctrines and the relation between any two religious sects and communities was embittered by intolerance and contempt of each other. A study of his view on religion and its practice in his life indicates that it was a mission in his life to end these conflicts and bring about reconciliation. He not only cherished a definite view on religious matters but also practiced different religions, such as Islam, Buddhist, Christianity, under the guidance of the expert of that particular religion. Sri Ramakrishna’s teachings go a long way in resolving the conflicts of these religions if not to end them. For him, the different religions may differ in their creeds, doctrines, ways and means but these do not constitute the essence of religion. What constitutes the essence of religion is the direct *experience* of God. So far as this is concerned, Hindus, Muslims and Christians agree; they reach the same goal – God – by travelling different paths. So there is an essential unity of all these religions, only difference being that they call the same goal or reality by the different names of Bhagavān, Allah and God. According to him, even Buddha became the Buddha by meditating on that which was of the nature of *bodho*, that is, pure consciousness which is the same as God, though he could not express it by words.

Not only this. His realization that the essence of all religions is the *experience* of God enables him to find out a solution of the severe conflicts and clashes among the different sects of Hinduism, such as the conflict between the believers in the pure Atman and Brahman without form and quality *and* the worshippers of a Personal God with form and quality. He taught that all religions from crude image worship to contemplation of the pure, formless Brahman are true, and that they are all capable of leading their followers to the highest end of human life, that is, to realize God. "Just as a mother gives different food-stuffs to her different children to suit their different digestive powers, so God has made different religions to suit the different intellectual capacities of His children". So Sri Ramakrishna says: "So many religions are so many paths".

(viii) Sri Ramakrishna also cherished a view on the true end of human life. According to him, the true end of man's life is to realize the divinity in him by its *direct experience*. To realize God, it is necessary to wash away the impurities of the mind. He says: "The mind is like a needle covered with mud, and God is like a magnet. The needle cannot be united with the magnet unless it is free from mud. Tear wash away the mud, which is nothing but lust, anger, greed, and other evil tendencies, and the inclination to worldly enjoyments as well. As soon as the mud is washed away, the magnet attracts the needle, that is to say, man realizes God". Although Sri Ramakrishna says that the true end of man's life is the realization of God, he does not ignore or despise the other ends of life, like kama or enjoyment, artha or wealth, and dharma or religious duties. He would advise some people to live the householder's life, do his duties and have children, but always with his mind turned towards God. He says: "The tortoise moves about in the water. But you can guess where her thoughts are? There on the bank, where her eggs are lying. Do all your duties in the world, but keep your mind on God". Further, he says: "First rub your hands with oil and then break open the jack-fruit; otherwise they will be smeared with its sticky milk. First secure the oil of divine love, and then set your hands to the duties of the world".

Apart from the parables that are mentioned above in the context of analyzing his views on different topics, we may quote a few utterances of great significance:

(i) "There is nothing in mere scholarship. The object of study is to find means of knowing God and realizing Him. A holy man had a book. When asked what it contained,

he opened it and showed that on all the pages were written the words ‘Om Rāma’ , and nothing else”.

(ii) “The world is water and the mind is milk. If you pour milk into water they become one; you cannot find the pure milk any more. But turn the milk into curd and churn it into butter. Then, when that butter is placed in water, it will float. So, practise spiritual discipline in solitude and obtain the butter of knowledge and love. Even if you keep that butter in the water of the world the two will not mix. The butter will float”.

(iii) “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”.

(iv) “A frog had a rupee, which he kept in his hole. One day an elephant was going over the hole, and the frog, coming out in a fit of anger, raised his foot, as if to kick the elephant, and said, ‘How dare you walk over my head?’ Such is the pride that money begets!”

(v) “God cannot be realized if there is the slightest attachment to the things of the world. A thread cannot pass through the eye of a needle if the tiniest fiber sticks out”.

A few of the important topics/issues on which papers are invited are as follows:-

- 1. Philosophy of Sri Ramakrishna and Sankara’s philosophy of Advaita Vedanta.**
- 2. Philosophy of Sri Ramakrishna and Ramanuja’s philosophy of Visistadvaita.**
- 3. Sri Ramakrishna on the concept of *Maya* as *Lila* (creative power) and the World.**
- 4. Sri Ramakrishna on Bramhan, Atman, and God.**
- 5. Sri Ramakrishna’s on the Theory of the Ego and the Self.**
- 6. Sri Ramakrishna’s conception of the World.**
- 7. Sri Ramakrishna and the doctrine of Brahman (the Absolute) as Impersonal (*Nirguna*), personal (*Saguna*) and beyond both.**

8. Sri Ramakrishna on different revelations of Reality from different levels of Consciousness.

9. Sri Ramakrishna on the doctrine of Incarnation (*Avatar*)

10. Sri Ramakrishna on the unity and harmony of all religions.