

IDEOLOGY of Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission



The ideology of Ramakrishna Math and Mission consists of the eternal principles of Vedanta as lived and experienced by Sri Ramakrishna and expounded by Swami Vivekananda. This ideology has three characteristics: it is *modern* in the sense that the ancient principles of Vedanta have been expressed in the modern idiom; it is *universal*, that is, it is meant for the whole humanity; it is *practical* in the sense that its principles can be applied in day-to-day life to solve the problems of life. The basic principles of this ideology are given below:

✓1. God realization is the ultimate goal of life:

One of the important discoveries made in ancient India was that the universe arises from and is sustained by infinite consciousness called Brahman. It has both impersonal and personal aspects. The personal aspect is known by different names, such as God, Ishvar, Jehovah and so on. Realization of this Ultimate Reality is the true goal of life, for that alone can give us everlasting fulfilment and peace.

✓2. Potential divinity of the soul:

Brahman is immanent in all beings as the Atman which is man's true self and source of all happiness. But owing to ignorance, he identifies himself with his body and mind and runs after sense pleasures. This is the cause of all evil and suffering. As ignorance is removed, the Atman manifests itself more and more. This manifestation of potential divinity is the essence of true religion.

✓3. Synthesis of the Yogas:

The removal of ignorance and manifestation of inner divinity leading to God realization are achieved through Yoga. There are four main Yogas: Jnana Yoga (Yoga of Knowledge); Bhakti Yoga (Yoga of Devotion); Raja Yoga (Yoga of Meditation); Karma Yoga (Yoga of Work). Each Yoga is an independent means of realizing God. But since each Yoga involves the cultivation of one of the faculties such as reason, feeling or will, a combination of



all the four Yogas is necessary for the development of a balanced, 'fully functioning' personality. It is this synthesis of Yogas that Swami Vivekananda regarded as the ideal of Ramakrishna Math and Mission. This ideal finds expression in the EMBLEM of the twin organizations shown here, which was designed by Swamiji himself. In the emblem the wavy waters represent Karma Yoga; the lotus flower represents Bhakti Yoga; the rising sun represents Jnana Yoga; the coiled serpent represents Raja Yoga; **and** the Swan represents the Supreme Self. The meaning of the ensemble is by the combined practice of all the four Yogas the Supreme Self is realized.

✓ 4. **Morality based on strength:**

According to Swami Vivekananda, weakness is the main cause of immorality, evil and suffering in life, and the cause of weakness is ignorance about one's true nature as the Atman. Knowledge of the Atman gives us tremendous strength to overcome our weakness and lead a virtuous life. Everyone is endowed with so many potentialities, but owing to fear and weakness, most of these potentialities remain unactualized. When, through knowledge of the Atman, fear and weakness are overcome, these potentialities manifest themselves. Swamiji called this process 'man-making education'.

✓ 5. **Harmony of Religions:**

Although the idea that 'one Reality is known by different names' (Vedas) and the idea that 'different spiritual paths lead to the same goal' (Gita) are found in the Hindu scriptures and in the teachings of several Hindu saints, Sri Ramakrishna was the first person in history to show through direct experience the transcendental unity of all religions. His message implies two kinds of religious harmony: harmony within Hinduism and harmony among world religions.

✓ a. **Harmony within Hinduism:**

Sri Ramakrishna did not identify himself with any particular sect of Hinduism but accepted Hinduism as a whole. He showed that Dualism, Non-dualism and other schools of Hindu philosophy represent different stages of the integral experience of Reality, and that the various Hindu Deities are different aspects of one supreme Godhead. His message has brought about a great deal of harmony among the Hindu sects, and Sri Ramakrishna himself has become the symbol of the unity of Hindu religion.

✓ b. **Harmony among World Religions:**

It should be noted that Sri Ramakrishna recognized the differences among religions but showed that, in spite of these differences, they lead to the same Ultimate Goal. This is the meaning of his famous maxim, *Yato mat, tato path*, "As many faiths, so many paths".

Apart from this, Swami Vivekananda also held that the religions of the world are expressions of one eternal Universal Religion. Since Vedanta contains all the basic principles and laws of the spiritual world, Swamiji regarded Vedanta as that eternal



Universal Religion. That is to say, Vedanta can serve as the common ground for all religions.

✓6. Avatarhood of Sri Ramakrishna:

According to the Hindu religious tradition, God incarnates himself as the Avatar in every Age in order to give a new message to humanity suited to the needs of each Age. In the Ramakrishna Movement, Sri Ramakrishna is adored as the Avatar of the Modern Age. What this means is that his life and teachings have opened a new way of salvation for humanity. The uniqueness of Sri Ramakrishna's Avatarhood is that it embodies the spiritual consciousness of earlier Avatars and prophets, including those who are outside the Hindu fold, and is in harmony with all religious traditions. In all the institutions of the Ramakrishna Order, worshipful reverence is shown to all Avatars and the founders of all religions.

✓7. **A New Philosophy of Work:** Swami Vivekananda has given a new philosophy of work for the modern world. All work in the Ramakrishna Math and Mission is done according to this philosophy of work, which is based on the following principles:

✓a. According to Vedanta, the physical universe is a manifestation of God known as Virat. Hence, as Sister Nivedita has stated, there is 'no distinction between the sacred and the secular'. What this statement means is that all work is sacred. Even menial work such as sweeping the floor or mending shoes is to be done with as much attention and devotion as work in the shrine.

✓b. The Gita (18.46) states that the all-pervading God is the ultimate source of all work and the enjoyer of the fruits of all sacrifice. Hence all work is to be done as worship and the fruits of actions are to be offered to the Lord.

✓c. One of the important principles Swami Vivekananda learned from his Master was **Shiva Jnane Jiva Seva**, 'to serve Jiva as Shiva'. Since man is potentially Divine, service to man is indeed service to God. Instead of looking upon a needy person as an object of pity, he is looked upon as an object of worship. Such an attitude elevates both the giver and the recipient.

✓d. Swami Vivekananda was the first religious leader in India to speak for the poor and the downtrodden and to state boldly, 'He who sees Shiva in the poor, in the weak and the diseased, really worships Shiva; and ... with him Shiva is more pleased than with the man who sees Him only in temples.' It was Swamiji who coined the word **daridra-narayana** to refer to the poor. Swamiji's love and concern for the poor continues as a directive principle in Ramakrishna Mission's service programmes.

✓e. When work, any work, is done fulfilling the above conditions, it becomes a spiritual discipline: the mind gets purified and the potential Divinity of the soul manifests itself more and more. Thus work done as worshipful service benefits the doer himself spiritually: it becomes a spiritual discipline or Yoga.

It is with this understanding of work as a spiritual discipline (Karma Yoga) that all the service activities of the Ramakrishna Mission, such as giving food and clothing to the poor, nursing the sick etc, are undertaken. Thus service done as worship of God in man helps in two ways: it helps physically or mentally the person *who is served*, and it helps spiritually the person **who serves**.

Motto:

This two-fold aim of service activities, indeed the whole ideology of Ramakrishna Math and Mission, has been put in a nutshell in the MOTTO of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission, *Atmano mokshartham jagat hitaya cha*, 'For one's own salvation and for the welfare of the world', formulated by Swami Vivekananda.

Straight Talk on Religion

"Excerpts from The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda"

"1. You may believe in all the religious places in the world, carry in your head all the sacred books ever written, you may baptize yourself in all the rivers of the earth, still, if you have no perception of God, I would class you with the rankest atheist."

"2. And you may never have entered a temple, church or a mosque, nor performed any ceremony, but if you feel God within yourself and are thereby lifted above the vanities of the world, you are holy, a saint, call yourself what you will."

"3. As soon as a person stands up and says they are right or their religion is right, and all others are wrong, they are themselves all wrong. Upon the proof of all the others depends the proof of our own. Love and charity for the whole human race, that is the test of true religiousness. I do not mean the sentimental statement that all men are brothers, but that one must feel the oneness of human life."

"4. So far as they are not exclusive, I see that the sects and creeds are all mine; they are all grand. They are all helping men and women towards the real religion. I will add, it is good to be born in a temple, but it is bad to die there. It is good to be born a child, but bad to remain a child. Temples, ceremonies, and symbols are good for children, but when the child is grown, he must burst the temple or himself."

"5. We must not remain children for ever. It is like trying to fit one coat to all sizes and growths. I do not deprecate the existence of sects in the world. Would to God there were twenty millions more, for the more there are, there will be a greater field for selection. What I do object to is trying to fit one religion to every case."

"6. Though all religions are essentially the same, they must have the varieties of form produced by dissimilar circumstances among different nations. We must each have our own individual religion, individual so far as the externals of it go."

"7. Until your religion makes you realize God, it is useless. He who only studies books for religion reminds one of the fable of the ass which carried a heavy load of sugar on its back, but did not know the sweetness of it."

"The man at whose feet I sat all my life--and it is only a few ideas of his that I try to teach--could [hardly] write his name at all. All my life I have not seen another man like that, and I have traveled all over the world. When I think of that man, I feel like a fool, because I want to read books and he never did. He never wanted to lick the plates after other people had eaten. That is why he was his own book."

"8. All my life I am repeating what Jack said and John said, and never say anything myself. What glory is it that you know what John said twenty-five years ago and what Jack said five years ago? Tell me what you have to say."

"Mind you, there is no value in learning. You are all mistaken in learning. The only value of knowledge is in the strengthening, the disciplining, of the mind. By all this eternal swallowing it is a wonder that we are not all dyspeptics. Let us stop, and burn all the books, and get hold of ourselves, and think."

"You all talk [about] and get distracted over losing your "individuality". You are losing it every moment of your lives by this eternal swallowing. If any one of you believes what I teach, I will be sorry. I will only be too glad if I can excite in you the power of thinking for yourselves.... My ambition is to talk to men and women, not to sheep."

"9. By men and women, I mean individuals. You are not little babies to drag all the filthy rags from the street and bind them up into a doll!"

"This is a place for learning! That man is placed in the university! He knows all about what Mr. Blank said!" But Mr. Bland said nothing! If I had the choice, I would ... say to the professor, "Get out! You are nobody!" Remember this individualism at any cost! Think wrong if you will, no matter whether you get truth or not. The whole point is to discipline the mind. That truth which you swallow from others will not be yours. You cannot teach truth from my mouth; neither can you learn truth from my mouth. None can teach another."

"10. You have to realize truth and work it out for yourself according to your own nature. ... All must struggle to be individuals--strong, standing on your own feet, thinking your own thoughts, realizing your own Self. No use swallowing doctrines others pass on--standing up together like soldiers in jail, sitting down together, all eating the same food, all nodding their heads at the same time. Variation is the sign of life. Sameness is the sign of death."

"11. Once I was in an Indian city, and an old man came to me. He said, "Swami, teach me the way." I saw that that man was as dead as this table before me. Mentally and spiritually he was really dead. I said, "Will you do what I ask you to do? Can you steal? Can you drink wine? Can you eat meat?""

"12. The man [exclaimed], "What are you teaching!"

"I said to him, "Did this wall ever steal? Did the wall ever drink wine?"

"No, sir."

"Man steals, and he drinks wine, and becomes God. "I know you are not the wall, my friend. Do something! Do something!" I saw that if that man stole, his soul would be on the way to salvation."

"13. How do I know that you are individuals--all saying the same thing, all standing up and sitting down together? That is the road to death! Do something for your souls! Do wrong if you please, but do something! You will understand me by and by, if you do not just now. Old age has come upon the soul, as it were. It has become rusty. The rust must be [rubbed off], and then we go on. Now you understand why there is evil in the world. Go home and think of that, just to take off that rustiness!"