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RAMAKRISHNA MOVEMENT - A SYMBOL OF WORLD CULTURAL UNITY

Recently the Ramakrishna Order, an organization of *sanyasins* who have dedicated their lives for the good of the world and for their own salvation, completed one hundred years of its useful existence. As if by divine providence, this year coincided with the 150th Birth Anniversary of Sri Ramakrishna, the founder of this vital Movement. This twice-blessed occasion was celebrated all over India, and even in some foreign countries, with pomp and gaiety. Special worship sessions, processions, youth programmes, scholarly discourses by the elite of the society on the message of Sri Ramakrishna, and philanthropic and charitable acts of service to the downtrodden and the needy were the main items of the celebrations. Peasants and pleibians, kings and commanders alike, participated in these celebrations with equal zest. Speaking on this occasion at a function organized by the Ramakrishna Mission, New Delhi, Sri Rajiv Gandhi, the Prime Minister of India, observed: "The Ramakrishna Movement is a great national endeavour, combining inspiration and idealism with compassion and action in the form of religious service for the common man. The Movement has taught a philosophy which could be related to the social problems of education and health, women's uplift, relief in natural or man-made calamities. The Ramakrishna schools and colleges are among the best and are spread to distant corners of our country. I thank and felicitate the Ramakrishna Order for the century of service to the nation and its people. I am sure the organisation will blaze many a trail, show a true religion of compassion for all beings, respect for all religions, service to the depressed and the oppressed, meditation and action, purification of the self and of the society true to the precepts of Vivekananda."

Such glowing tributes have come from all parts of the globe. At this hour of festivity and joy, it is worthwhile contemplating and assessing the cultural contributions of the Ramakrishna Movement to the world.

The Glory of Indian Culture

Etymologically, the word culture is derived from the Latin root 'colere' which means to till, to cultivate. The word 'cult' meaning worship is also derived from the same root. Both the words are intimately connected with each other. Tilling or cultivation is intended to draw out the potentialities of the seed in a plant. It is not by accident that agriculture and horticulture are derived from the same word 'culture'. Agriculture = Field + Culture, Horticulture = Garden + Culture. By these methods the potentialities of the seeds are drawn out. On the human level, the word means the drawing out of the potentialities of the soul or the spirit of man to its utmost perfection. Such a culture may be physical, mental, spiritual or integral.

India represents a remarkably diverse culture out of which a unity has developed. Indian culture thrives in a diversity born out of differences in the geographical, climatic and economic factors, of a variety of races whose origins and languages are distinct from one another. Yet these are knit into a sequential unity through a gradual process of cultural evolution for the last several centuries. India has been the home of all the major world religions. Hinduism, the mother of religions, has been her very life-breath. Mahavir Tirtankara who founded Jainism, Buddha, who enveloped a major part of the world through his pragmatic religion of Buddhism, Guru Nanak, the founder of the militant Sikhism and a host of other saints were born in India and their followers still live in amity with each other throughout the length and breadth of the land. But this is not all. India has always accepted other religious communities also into her fold with open arms. Millions of muslims live in peace in India today. St Thomas, one of Christ's apostles, came and planted the seeds of Christianity in South India shortly after the passing away of Christ. We find numerous Christians in and around Kerala even today. The bulk of the now very small but highly intellectual, wealthy, enterprising and charitable Parsis worshipping Zend Avesta have had their home in this country for the last ten centuries.

History proves that India has always enriched herself, benefiting from these various religions and cultures. She has been following a healthy policy of 'give and take' attitude since time immemorial. It is on record that old Iranians, Greeks, Scythians and other people of Central Asia, Syrian Christians, Muslim Arabs, the primitive Huns and the Turks, and the ancient Chinese—all these came to India. There was a continuous

exchange between India and these civilisations in many fields throughout these centuries. But the peculiarity of Indian Culture has been that she has never been a prey to these cultural invasions. Rather she has assimilated all of them into herself. These 'melodies' have brought about great harmony in the Indian cultural thought and this harmony can be felt and appreciated only by those who have a corresponding harmony in their own souls. Otherwise, with a narrow look within, the same symphony would appear to be a jungle of discordant and disordered notes.

This interplay of different cultures provides a clue to the building up the conception of a true 'world-culture'. By retaining the individuality of the basic principles of each of these cultures, it is possible to build up an integrated culture implying wholeness without loss of individual cultural values. Such a 'world culture' will show every man have to live fully in this glorious universe in the full consciousness of his own true nature, which is one with the spirit behind this apparently diverse universe filled with myriad names and forms.

India has been consciously or unconsciously experimenting intensely in this line. Her civilisation has shown signs of vigour and growth whenever this principle of unity of man has been well expressed and has degenerated whenever this principle has been forgotten. But time and again, she has been showing a resurgence of strength and an ability to overcome the trials and problems of invasion by foreign civilisations.

Romain Rolland, the famous French Nobel Laureate who had the 'symphony' in his soul to perceive this principle of unity working through the Indian civilisation writes in his biography of Sri Ramakrishna, "For a century in India, unity has been the target for the arrows of all archers. Fiery personalities throughout this century have sprung up from her sacred earth, a veritable ganges of peoples and thought. Whatever may be the differences between them, their goal is ever the same - human unity through God. And through all the changes of workmen, unity itself has expanded and gained in precision."¹

Drawbacks of Indian Culture

But India cannot afford to be complacent with her rich cultural heritage. Just as the West has been specializing in the material sciences, India has been destined to experiment in the cultural and religious spheres

1. *Life of Ramakrishna*, p. 8

since time immemorial. During the course of this long-drawn-out experiment it is inevitable that some undesirable accretions have accumulated and it is necessary that they be thrashed out, retaining only the essential and basic aspects of her culture.

Swami Vivekananda, the prophet of modern India who embodied in himself the highest ideals of the eastern and western cultures and of whom we shall have opportunities to quote profusely during the course of this article, studied the Indian culture impartially and rationally with an eye on its improvement. He said, "I disagree with all those who are giving their superstitions back to my people. Like the Egyptologists' interest in Egypt, it is easy to feel an interest in India that is purely selfish. One may desire to see again the India of one's looks, one's studies, one's dreams. My hope is to see again the strong points of that India reinforced by the strong points of this age, only in a natural way. The new state of things must be a growth from within."²

Irrespective of whether a man an Indian or an English man, Swami Vivekananda studied man as man and the cultural heritage he bequeathed to his future generations. He says, "Doubtless do I love India. But everyday my sight grows clearer. What is India, England or America to us? We are the servants of that God who by ignorant is called man. He who pours water at the root, does he not water the whole tree? There is but one basis of well-being, social, political or spiritual and that is to know that I and my brother are one. This is true for all countries and all people. And westerners, let me say, will realize it more quickly than the orientals, who have almost exhausted themselves in formulating the idea and producing a few cases of individual realisation."³

A truly universal man, Swami Vivekananda saw the good and useful points of the British rule in India. The factor of the highest importance was, India had come under a powerful machinery of the British Government which wielded its sceptre throughout the length and breadth of the land. And under their commercial supremacy, ideas and thoughts of different countries were forcing their way into the soul of India. Of these, Swami Vivekananda said, some were beneficial, some were positively harmful while some others exposed the inability of the foreigners to understand what really was the need of this country.

2. Sister Nivedita, *Master as I Saw Him*, p. 201

3. *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 1963 Vol. VIII, pp. 349-50

But apart from this undertsandable inability of a foreign race to come to grips with the problems of a country with a very different culture like ours, India herself had certain inherent weaknesses. What were the weak points that Swami Vivekananda found to be detrimental to the efficient functioning of her society, as coming in the way of her progress? The main defect, he said, was the lack of organizing capacity among Indians, their utter inability to co-ordinate and co-operate with each other for a common cause. Pointing these out, he says, "Why is it that organizations are so powerful? Do not say organization is material. Why is it that forty millions of Englishmen rule over three hundred millions of people here? What is the psychological explanation? These forty millions put their wills together and that means infinite power, and you three hundred millions have a will each separate from the other. Therefore, to make a great future India, the whole secret lies in organization, accumulation of power, co-ordination of wills, bringing them all, as it were, into one focus. Being of one mind is the secret of society. The secret of success of the westerners is the power of organization and combination. That is only possible with mutual trust and co-operation."⁴ . . . Organization has its faults, no doubt, but without that nothing can be done."⁵

In a letter written from America to a young disciple in India he writes: 'Go to work, my boys, the fire will come to you! The faculty of organization is entirely absent in our nature, but this has to be infused. The great secret is-absence of jealousy. Be always ready to concede to the opinions of your brethren, and try always to conciliate. That is the whole secret.'⁶

Again he says, "It is not at all in our nature to do a work conjointly. It is to this that our miserable condition is due. He who knows how to obey know how to command. Learn obedience first. Among the western nations, with such a high spirit of independence, the spirit of obedience is equally strong . . . Great enterprise, boundless courage, tremendous energy and above all, perfect obedience — these are the only traits that lead to industrial and national regeneration. These traits are altogether lacking in us."⁷

4. *Ibid.*, Vol. III, p. 299

5. *Ibid.*, Vol. VI, p. 301

6. *Letters of Swami Vivekananda*, 1970, p. 127

7. *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 1963, Vol. VI, p. 349

We find the same theme recurring throughout Swami Vivekananda's exhortations to his countrymen - to learn from the West their capacity for obedience with self-respect, which is the secret of collective action. To his brother-disciple Swami Akhandananda he writes: "Your idea is grand but our nation is totally lacking in the faculty of organization. It is the one drawback which produces all sorts of evil. We are altogether averse to making a common cause for anything. The first requisite for organization is obedience. We must have plodding industry and perseverance."⁸

But Swami Vivekananda did not lose hope of a bright future for India despite this major drawback. He saw that this mistake could be rectified, and piercing through the mass of whatever good or evil there might be, India would surely rise prosperously as a result of the interaction between her own national ideals and the good features of the newly introduced foreign ideals. He foresaw a glorious India slowly and gently awakening from deep slumber.

Eastern Culture Vs. Western Cultures

It will be highly interesting and edifying at this stage to compare and contrast the salient features of the eastern and western cultures which have survived the test of centuries of changes in the two civilizations.

The eastern culture emphasizes the "internal world" of man. It teaches man to reinforce his "within" and accept with patience the vicissitudes of the external world. It infuses in him the qualities of forbearance and endurance instead of struggling for advancement in the external world. It enhances a man's power of renunciation and capacity to undergo miseries, and relegates the role of action and enjoyment in life to the background.

As against this, the West has been specializing in the manipulation of the external world for achieving fulfilment and progress. The outlook of western culture focusses predominantly on seeming control of the external nature, which process is commonly termed as 'scientific'. Such an encounter with the external world helps an individual to bring out his qualities of faith and confidence in himself, courage and a sense of co-operation with one another in working for a common cause. It helps him to develop efficiency in work and healthy team spirit.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 321

The eastern mind deals with the larger aspects of things, the western mind with the minute and the immeasurable. The East believes in the All. The West also believes in the All, but separates it into many. The East unites, the West divides. The East believes in infinity, the West in boundaries. The East meditates, the West acts. The East thinks of nature as illusion and something to be liberated from, the West faces nature, analyzes it and sets it to work for him. The East has given philosophy, the West, the sciences. The East has given religion, the West has given creeds.⁹

The key-note of eastern civilization is *thought*. With the passage of centuries, its power of thought has not diminished. As against this, the western civilization carries forward the basic idea of *expression*. The basis of western civilization lies in an expansion of the expression of goodness through the society in various ways.

The West has specialized in the subject of man in society, man in lateral extension. Swami Vivekananda calls this the philosophy of manliness. The East has specialized in the subject of man in depth, man in vertical elevation. He calls this the philosophy of Godliness.

Each has its glory and grandeur. Each has its limitations too. The inadequacy of each of these philosophies taken separately is the story of history known to all of us. By neglecting the external world, the East has arrested the material progress of millions of humankind. Conversely, the western pursuit after material prosperity has killed the human soul itself with little future possibilities of spiritual evolution. As the famous western psychologist C.G. Jung has rightly pointed out, the ideals of external achievement and usefulness may help to a small extent in leading a comfortable material life, but they cannot guide us in the development of the wider consciousness to which we give the name of culture. Swami Vivekananda also noticed this western tragedy. He said, "Social life in the West is like a peal of laughter, but underneath it is a wail. It ends in a sob. The fun and frivolity are all on the surface. Really it is full of tragic intensity. In the East it is sad and gloomy on the outside, but underneath are carelessness and merriment."¹⁰

9. See Marie Louise Burke, *Swami Vivekananda in the West: New Discoveries*, Vol. I, 1983, p. 343

10. Sister Nivedita, *Master as I Saw Him*, p. 116

The Meeting of Narendranath and Sri Ramakrishna : The Emergence of Swami Vivekananda

Narendranath was the pre-monastic name of Swami Vivekananda when he first met his Guru Sri Ramakrishna. The meeting of these two souls in 1881 at Dakshineswar near Calcutta has been considered a momentous chapter in the annals of modern history. No two people could have been so vastly different in temperament than these two. And yet no two people were so intimate and attuned to each other as these two.

Ramakrishna represented the glorious and hoary cultural heritage of India. In the words of Romain Rolland, Sri Ramakrishna was "the consummation of two thousand years of the spiritual life of three hundred million people. Although he has been dead forty years, his soul animates modern India. He was no hero of action like Gandhi, no genius in art or thought like Goethe or Tagore. He was a little village Brahmin of Bengal whose outer life was set in a limited frame without striking incident, outside the political and social activities of his time. But his inner life embraced the whole multiplicity of men and gods. It was a part of the very source of Energy, the Divine Shakti."¹¹

"Narendranath, on the other hand, represented the western ideal of freedom and equality, manliness and energy of action. He is described by great thinkers as "a lion among men" and as "reckless in his sacrifice, unceasing in his activity, boundless in his love, profound and versatile in his wisdom, exuberant in his emotions, merciless in his attacks but yet simple as a child."¹²

We have an authentic account of these two personalities by the brother of Narendranath himself. He writes contrasting their qualities :

"Sri Ramakrishna had small eyes like those of an elephant. His face did not show much brightness and the movement of his hands were slow and tender. Normally his voice was not loud but was rather pathetic. He gave the impression of a man who preferred to remain detached from the world and live alone, so that the world might not touch him."

11. Romain Rolland, *Life of Ramakrishna*, 1984, p. 13

12. Subhas Chandra Bose, *Prabuddha Bharata*, July 1932, p. 352

“Narendranath had wide open eyes, a sharp look and a face well-shaped and fleshy. His countenance gave out a defiant attitude, as though not caring for the world. He had a majestic demeanour which may be called Napoleonic, as if people would stand to attention at his orders.

“The distinguishing trait of Sri Ramakrishna’s life consisted in his capacity for *thinking* through various nerves. He was not an adept in giving out energy or undertaking assignments requiring marital qualities. For Sri Ramakrishna thinking deeply was primary, and expression, secondary. That is why in the beginning common people failed to understand him properly and ridiculed him as a mad man.

“For Narendranath, *expression* was primary and deep thinking, secondary. If we make an appraisal of the two personalities, we would discern a lot of harmony between them. They did not imitate each other. Both maintained their individuality and independence. They had mutual love and regard, but each had independent area of action and method of functioning. Both thought independently. Each understood the world according to his own thoughts. Each endeavoured to solve the issues facing the world according to his own wisdom.... For Sri Ramakrishna, God was the centre and living beings or man, the periphery. For Narendranath, the living creatures or man was the centre and God, the periphery.”¹³

The meeting of these two typical representatives of the eastern and western cultures is described in a touching manner in the life of Swami Vivekananda.

“Sri Ramakrishna represented traditional India, with its spiritual perspective, its asceticisms and realizations – the India of the Upanishads. To him came Narendranath with all the doubts and scepticism of the modern age, unwilling to accept even the highest truths of religion without verification, yet with a zeal for Truth burning within him. Narendranath had yet to learn that reason, though the best instrument in the relative world, could not carry one beyond relativity to the Absolute where the truth of religion abides. The result of this contact of Sri Ramakrishna with Narendranath, was Swami Vivekananda – he who was to become the heart and mind of a new India; its ancient perspectives heightened, widened and

13. Mohendranath Dutt, *Reflections on Sri Ramakrishna* 1986, pp. 158–60

strengthened to include modern learning. The intense activity of the West was to be combined with the deep meditation of the East. Asceticism and retirement were to be supplemented by work and service to others. From the merging of these two currents came New Hinduism—the faith a glorious tomorrow in which all should be fulfilment and nothing denial.”¹⁴

Sri Aurobindo, a noted saint of the last century and an admirer of Vivekananda refers to this meeting as “the first visible sign to the world that India was awake not only to survive but to conquer.”¹⁵

An account of how this conquest of the world was made can be attempted from a study of the life and message of Vivekananda who emerged out of the meeting of the two personalities Narendranath and Ramakrishna, who had assimilated in his own personality the manliness of the West and the godliness of the East, and who was himself a rare synthesis of the “philanthropic energy” of the West and the “philosophic calm” of the East.

Vivekananda and the synthesis of Eastern & Western Cultures

The interaction of these two cultures is of paramount significance to the present-day world. The West has at last found out that no amount of control and manipulation of external life can cure the evils of human life. It is experiencing the need for some other force besides its power of expression. With the help of its own science, the West is now prepared to recognize the principal of spiritual oneness of the universe and the divinity of man as his essential, inner core.

The intermingling of these two cultures, however, does not mean the merging of the one into the other. The West would retain its distinct and basic idea of expression, of the expression of good through the external universe and thereby transcend physical limitations. But this going outwards will be accompanied by an ability to go inwards also.

Similarly, the East will retain its own basic culture, namely, the spiritual oneness of the universe and the manifestation of divinity that is within every human being. But this idea of going inward will be complemented, by a vigorous and active life leading to social improvement and technological advancement in the external world. Balance or wholeness,

14. Eastern & Western Disciples, *Life of Swami Vivekananda*, 1979, p. 75

15. *Sri Aurobindo*, Vol. 2 (1972), p. 37

will be achieved when the power to perceive the underlying unity would be equalled by the power to build up a self-reliant and economically strong, progressive society.

In the teachings of Swami Vivekananda we find such a confluence of the two cultures, where both the cultures shed their limitations and accept the good points of the other. He says : "The great idea which the world is waiting to receive from our Upanishads is the solidarity of this universe. The old lines of demarcation and differentiation are vanishing rapidly. Electricity and steam-power are placing the different parts of the world in inter-communication with each other and as a result the Hindus no longer say that every country beyond their own bound is peopled with demons and hobgoblins, nor do people of Christian countries say that India is peopled by cannibals and savages. When we go out of our country we find the same brother-man, with the same strong hand to help, with the same lips to say godspeed. And sometimes they are better than in the country in which we are born. Our Upanishads say that the cause of all our misery is ignorance. And that is perfectly true when applied to every state of life, either social or spiritual. It is ignorance that makes us hate each other, it is through ignorance that we do not know and do not love each other. As soon as we come to know each other, love comes, must come, for are we not one? Thus we find solidarity coming in spite of itself. Even in politics and sociology, problems that were only national twenty years ago can no more be solved on national grounds only. They are assuming huge proportion, gigantic shapes. They can only be solved when looked at in the broader light of international grounds. International organizations, international combinations, international laws are the cry of the day. That shows solidarity."¹⁶

And again "Today the ancient Greek is meeting the ancient Hindu on the soil of India. Thus slowly and silently the leaven has come. The broadening, the life-giving and the revivalist movement that we see all around us has been worked out by these forces together. A broader and more generous conception of life is before us. And although at first, we have been deluded a little and wanted to narrow things down, we are finding out today that these generous impulses which are at work, these broader conceptions of life, are the logical interpretation of what is in our ancient books. They are the carrying out, to the rigorously logical effect,

16. *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 1963, Vol. III, pp. 240-41

of the primary conceptions of our own ancestors. To become broad, to go out, to amalgamate, to universalize, is the end of our aims. And all the time we have been making ourselves smaller and smaller, and dissociating ourselves, contrary to the plans laid down in our scriptures".¹⁷

Analyzing lucidly the merits and demerits of the two cultures, Swami, Vivekananda concludes that in integrated world culture will become a reality only if we give up our narrow outlook and accept the good points in each other. He says "The present adjustment will be the harmonizing, the mingling of these two ideals. To the Oriental, the world of spirit is as real as to the Occident is the world of senses. In the spiritual, the oriental finds everything he wants or hopes for. . . In it he finds all that makes life real to him. To the Occidental he is a dreamer. To the Oriental, the Occidental is a dreamer playing with ephemeral toys, and he laughs to think that grown up men and women should make so much of a handful of matter which they will have to leave sooner or later. Each calls the other a dreamer. But the Oriental ideal is as necessary for the progress of the human race as is the Occidental, and I think it is more necessary. Machines never made mankind happy and never will make. He who is trying to make us believe this will claim that happiness is in the machine. But it is always in the mind. That man alone who is the Lord of his mind can become happy, none else..... Nothing can make you happy unless you have the power of happiness in yourself, unless you have conquered yourself. Man is born to conquer nature, it is true. But the Occidental means by 'nature' only physical or external nature. It is true that external nature is majestic, with its mountains, and oceans and rivers, and with its infinite powers and varieties. Yet there is a more majestic internal nature of man, higher than the sun, the moon and the stars, higher than this earth of ours, higher than the physical universe, transcending these little lives of ours. There the Orientals excel, just as the Occidentals excel in the other. Therefore, it is fitting that, whenever there is a spiritual adjustment, it should come from the Orient. It is also fitting that when the Oriental wants to learn about machine-making, he should sit at the feet of the Occidental and learn from him. When the Occident wants to learn about God, he must sit at the feet of the Oriental."¹⁸

17. *Ibid.*, p. 271-72

18. *Ibid.*, Vol. IV, 1963, p. 155-56

After thus clearly presenting his views on the complementary roles of the two cultures, Swami Vivekananda finally envisages the emergence of a future world order based on it in the following unambiguous terms: "My whole ambition in life is to set in motion a machinery which will bring noble ideas to the door of everybody, and then let men and women settle their own fate. Let them know what our forefathers as well as other nations have thought on the most momentous questions of life. Let them see specially what others are doing now, and then decide. We are to put the chemicals together, the crystallization will be done by nature according to her laws ----- Can you become an occidental of occidentals in your spirit of equality, freedom, work and energy, and at the same time a Hindu to the very backbone in religious culture and instincts? This is to be done and we will do it. Have faith in yourselves. Great convictions are the mothers of great deeds."¹⁹

Significance of Swami Vivekananda's Unique Contribution

This significant and relevant contribution of Swami Vivekananda to world culture has been rightly understood and appreciated by many brilliant thinkers. Indeed they have described Swami Vivekananda himself as a typical embodiment of a perfect synthesis of the two cultures. None, of course, can express an idea more vividly and aesthetically than the first Noble Laureate of India, Rabindranath Tagore. He says, "Vivekananda rose keeping the East to his right and the West to his left and himself standing in between. The purpose of his life was not to contract India for all time to narrow thought-moulds by excluding the West from Indian History. To accept, to mingle, to create was verily his genius. He sacrificed his life to open up a communication line by which the achievements of India may be given to the West and the achievements of the West may be accepted by India."²⁰

The West is more in need of this message than the East. They have almost reached a point of saturation through their experiments on the positive sciences and at last have realized that this integration alone will save them from certain disaster. As the great Historian Arnold Toynbee pointed out, "Sri Ramakrishna's message is the only alternative to destroying ourselves."

19. *Ibid.*, Vol. V, 1963, p. 29

20. *Rabindra Rachanavali*, Vol. XIII, p. 55

Sister Nivedita, the earliest disciple of Swami Vivekananda refers to his mind as "penetrative and comprehensive" at the same time. In her classic introduction to the *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, she sums up the ideas of Swamiji on this subject in the following words: "It is this which adds its crowning significance to our Master's (Vivekananda's) life, for here he becomes the meeting point, not only of East and West but also of past and future. If the many and the One be indeed the same Reality, then it is not all modes of worship alone, but equally all modes of work, all modes of struggle, all modes of creation, which are paths of realization. No distinction, henceforth, between sacred and secular. To labour is to pray. To conquer is to renounce. Life itself is religion. To have and to hold is as stern a trust as to quit and to avoid.

"This is the realization which makes Vivekananda the great preacher of action, not as divorced from, but as expressing knowledge and devotion. To him the workshop, the study, the farmyard and the field are as true and fit scenes for the meeting of God with man as the cell of the monk or the door of the temple. To him there is no difference between service of man and worship of God, between manliness and faith, between true righteousness and spirituality. All his words, from one point of view, read as a commentary upon this central conviction. Art, science and religion, he said once, are but three different ways of expressing a single truth."²¹

Another enlightened westerner who could be regarded as having understood Vivekananda thoroughly was Romain Rolland. He explains how Vivekananda completely identified himself with the aspirations and problems of the westerners while formulating his message: "I shall try to show how closely allied is the aspect of Vivekananda's thought to our own, with our special needs, torments, aspirations, and doubts, urging us ever forward, like a blind mole, by instinct upon the road leading to the light. Naturally, I hope to be able to make other westerners, who resemble me, feel the attraction that I feel for this elder brother, the son of the Ganges, who of all modern men achieved the highest equilibrium between the diverse forces of thought, and was one of the first to sign a treaty of peace between the two forces eternally warring within us, the forces of reason and faith."²²

"In two words equilibrium and synthesis, Vivekananda's constructive genius may be summed up. He embraced all the paths of the spirit, the four yogas in their entirety, renunciation and service, art and science, religion

21. *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 1963, Vol. I, pp. XIII-XIV

22. *Life of Vivekananda*, Romain Rolland, p. 192

and action from the most spiritual to the most practical. Each of the ways that he taught had its own limits but he himself had been thro' them all and embraced them all. As in the quadriga, he held the reins of all four ways of truth, and he travelled towards unity along them all simultaneously. He was the personification of the harmony of all human Energy."²³

Contribution of Ramakrishna Movement to a United World Culture

This, then, is the unique contribution of Swami Vivekananda to world culture – to accept and absorb the good points in all the existing though distinct cultures. He bequeathed this unique message to the Ramakrishna Order of which he was a pioneer and we may say, the co-founder along with his Guru Sri Ramakrishna. Sister Nivedita says that Vivekananda defined the mission of the Ramakrishna Order as that of realizing and exchanging the highest ideals of the East and of the West.²⁴

Today the Ramakrishna Order is trying to put this ideal into practice in its day-to-day activities by a judicious blend of work and worship, of loving service and contemplation. Although the Organization has less than a thousand monks, it has gained a global reputation and fame on account of its relevance to the present-day conditions and its acceptance by people of all strata of the society, both in the East and the West. The invisible but palpable influence of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda is having a snowballing effect on the working of the Order and the society it serves and so more and more countries, even communistic, are slowly accepting the message of these two great souls without reservation. Modern world conditions and urges makes the acceptance of this ideal an imperative necessity. The eastern and western cultures remain contradictory no more but are becoming complementary. The day, therefore, is not far off when this unique message will not be restricted to an individual like Vivekananda but will become the property of common man everywhere.

23. *Ibid.*, p. 310

24. Sister Nivedita, *The Master as I Saw Him*, p. 45