

Key concepts

- Ramakrishna had many mystical experiences from a young age. These influenced his thought to understand that all Hindu deities are manifestations of the same universal reality.
- His mystical experiences also led him to a new way of applying Advaita Vedanta, the idea of ultimate unity, which had been primarily applied to the jnana path described in the Upanishads, to another path for reaching God, namely bhakti. The end goal was unity with the same God or divine consciousness and that not only all paths, but all religions were paths to this same destination.
- Seeing everything as the Divine Mother, was an entirely new application of Vedanta, often described as 'Neo-Vedanta'. Ramakrishna highlighted that Advaita was not just a 'spiritual' or metaphysical teaching but encompassed the material world.
- He had great success in promoting Hinduism among the intellectual classes who under British Rule had started to reject Hinduism.
- He charged Swami Vivekananda, with the mission of sharing Neo-Vedanta, his message of universalist Advaita combined with social action, with the world. Vivekananda officially founded Ramakrishna Mission in 1897 teaching that the contemporary Hindu path to Moksha is a blend of Service (Karma), Wisdom (Jnana) and Love (Bhakti) as well as the fundamental unity of all humanity to help heal the world.
- Ram Mohan Roy founded Brahmo Samaj, a new religious movement that explicitly rejected all Hindu practices not scripturally supported by Upanishadic teachings.
- At the Parliament of World religions in May 1893, Vivekananda presented principle of dharma as a universal brotherhood across faiths and also as a message of peace between faiths.
- Ramakrishna said, 'if one loves God, one can see Him in all people and can love them all irrespective of their nationality, religion or social status.' He challenged everyone to challenge casteism.
- Ramakrishna through his direct encounter with deities, stated that divine intelligence whilst having no inherent form was responsive to loving worship in whichever form was sincerely worshipped.

Key quotes

'Mother is Brahman and Brahman is mother.' **Gospel of Ramakrishna by Swami Nikhilananda.**

"The ideology of Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna 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."

Ideology of Belur Math: the headquarters of the Mission.

"When one realises that everyone is essentially divine, one can no longer treat other people badly."

Jamison, I., 'Hinduism', Philip Allan Updates, (2006).

"As the different streams having their sources in different places all mingle their water in the sea, so, O Lord, the different paths which men take, through different tendencies, various though they appear, crooked or straight, all lead to Thee!" **Vivekananda, World Parliament, 1893 speech extract.**

Key words

Advaita Vedanta	Ram Mohan Roy	Vivekananda	Brahmo Samaj	bhakti
Ramakrishna Mission	Upanishads	mystical	Moksha	
Ramakrishna	universal reality	karma	jnana	

Issues for analysis and evaluation

Key arguments/debates

Some would argue that Vivekananda is more important than Ramakrishna in the development of Hinduism as a world religion.

Others would argue that it was Ramakrishna's vision.

Some would argue that both were as important as each other.

Key questions

To what extent was Ramakrishna influenced by Western ideas?

How influential were Ramakrishna's mystical experiences on his thought?

Is Ramakrishna more important than Vivekananda in the development of Hinduism?