

Ramakrishna Paramhansa's Idea of Religious Harmony in Promoting Religious Tolerance in Contemporary World

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ABSTRACT

Religious diversities have played a crucial role in shaping the human civilization. Harmony between different religions is integral for the attainment of global peace and social cohesion. This paper seeks to explore the relevance of religious harmony as conceptualized by Ramakrishna Paramhansa, as a pathway for peaceful coexistence in a pluralistic world. A 19th-century mystic of Bengal, Ramakrishna Paramhansa professed that all religions are different paths leading to the same truth. His idea of the harmony of religions was shaped by his personal spiritual experiences, practised through different paths of different religions, leading to the same divine truth. One of his famous preachings, "Joto Math, Tato Path" (as many faiths, so many paths), underscores the diversity of religious practices prevailing in society. He rather emphasized ones efforts to spiritual practices. This pluralistic vision of religions foster mutual respect and acceptance, in today's globalized and multicultural world. The paper highlights Ramakrishna's concept of 'spiritual harmony,' which contributes to social integrity and cohesion. His teachings and ideas were propagated by Swami Vivekananda to the world through the Ramakrishna Movement which is being carried forward by The Ramakrishna Mission which continues to promote interfaith dialogue and social service advancing the harmony and peace in the society. While translating Ramakrishna's philosophy into practical solutions is challenging, his message of spiritual harmony holds immense potential in healing and uniting communities. In conclusion, Ramakrishna's vision of religious harmony, based on recognizing differences while pursuing a common truth, offers a timeless path to a more inclusive and peaceful world where all faiths coexist harmoniously.

1. Introduction

Today's globalized and multicultural world, where religions and cultures are highly diverse, has been facing challenges of securing peaceful coexistence of different communities, which

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necessitates the need for religious harmony and mutual understanding. The teachings of spiritual leaders who promote interfaith understanding are extremely important in this regard. Ramakrishna Paramhansa is one such luminary whose deep understanding of religion and spirituality cuts across sectarian lines.

Ramakrishna Paramhansa, a saint & mystic of 19th century Bengal, is well known for his all-encompassing approach to spirituality, which emphasized on the harmony among all religious paths. His life and teachings reflects a vision of religious harmony that seeks to bridge the divides between different faith traditions, promoting a message of tolerance, respect, and mutual understanding. For Ramakrishna, all religions were valid pathways to the Divine, and he encouraged his followers to embrace the underlying unity in the diverse expressions of faiths.

2. Theoretical Framework

This paper draws on religious philosophy, development theory, post-modernism, and political theory. It aims to explore how Ramakrishna Paramhansa's idea of religious harmony can be a model to promote religious tolerance for peace, stability, and development, especially for post-colonial, conflict-ridden societies of the Global South. The core of the paper revolves around Ramakrishna's spiritual pluralism about similar paths of all religions converging to the same divine reality (Tejasananda, 2023). According to Ramakrishna, spiritual pluralism was not an abstract idea but a lived experience of following religions (Hinduism, Islam, Christianity) to foster inter religious respect and coexistence (Tejasananda, 2023). The key elements of Ramakrishna's philosophy are "**Yato Mat Tato Path**" ("As many faiths, so many paths"): A call for universal spiritual acceptance; Experiential Syncretism: Unlike theoretical pluralism, Ramakrishna lived different faiths, legitimizing their validity; Transcendence of Sectarianism: Rejecting religious superiority and institutional dogma (Tapasyananda, 2022). Thus, it offers a model of peaceful religious coexistence in multicultural societies experiencing identity-based conflicts.

Aldous Huxley placed Ramakrishna within his concept of the "Perennial Philosophy", a universal core of truth underlying all religions (Nikhilananda, 1948). In *The Perennial Philosophy*, Huxley refers to Ramakrishna as an exemplar of "unitary spiritual insight" (Nikhilananda, 1948). He viewed Ramakrishna's pluralism not as mere tolerance, but as direct realization of the one through many (Nikhilananda, 1948). In his comparative religion work, Huston Smith highlighted Ramakrishna as a rare example of someone who fully practiced multiple religions and realized their common essence (Chetanananda, 1995). He attempted to promote Ramakrishna's philosophy in Western academia as a model of interfaith dialogue (Chetanananda, 1995). "Ramakrishna was a rare combination of individuality and universality, personality and impersonality" (Chetanananda, 1995).

This paper also uses critical development theories to explain how religious intolerance and the politicization of religion subvert development in the Global South (Klenk, 2011). Dependency theory by Andre Gunder Frank explains how post-colonial states are underdeveloped because of external exploitation and internal instability, including sectarian violence (Kay, 2005). These conflicts reduce state capacity and divert resources away from economic growth and governance. The post-development theory by Arturo Escobar is the critique of the western model of secular, economic development that is disconnected from indigenous and spiritual worldviews (Matthews, 2010). It also proposes that local religious-philosophical traditions (e.g., Ramakrishna's harmony) can lead development to integrate peace, ethics, and culture (Tapasyananda, 2022).

According to Amartya Sen's capability approach freedom, tolerance, and social inclusion are the components of human development (Martinetti et al, 2020). Religious harmony is the bedrock of freedom of belief and freedom from violence; freedom from religious obscurantism creates the space of development (Martinetti et al, 2020). Societies wracked by communal conflict are not societies in which development is possible. Ramakrishna's ideals can provide the ethical and spiritual substrate for such a society (Tejasananda, 2023). Postmodernism challenges the grand narratives of religious absolutism and secular modernism. It provides an antidote to religious exclusivity (Thompson, 2023). According to Lyotard incredulity toward meta-narratives rejects the sufficiency of any religious or secular ideology (Thompson, 2023). Ramakrishna's teaching resonates with postmodern scepticism, articulating multiple paths to truth. According to Foucault's concept of Power and knowledge, Religion is a mechanism of control (Shah, 2022). Ramakrishna's mysticism bypassed organized institutions, democratizing spiritual experience. Religious tolerance can thus be foundational, not due to religious adherence but to a general methodological and cultural openness to truth and meaning (Tapasyananda, 2022). Ramakrishna's pluralism can be read as a postmodernist spiritual discourse (Sen, 2006). It destabilizes fundamentalism and religious hierarchy (Sen, 2006). It opens up religion to the fluidity and lived experience of the individual (Sen, 2006).

Historically, the Western model of development was predicated upon the secularization of the state, reducing the political role of religion and thus ensuring development that was inclusive and rational (Tricontinental, 2025). While, most of the Third World countries are deeply entangled in religion and politics, which causes: Religious polarization, majoritarianism and minority exclusion, communal violence. This is not conducive to nation-building and public service delivery (Tricontinental, 2025).

For example: Western countries like France, Germany, USA have secular constitutions where religions coexist without state endorsement of any religion (Tricontinental, 2025). But for many developing countries, politics is based on religious identities (e.g., India, Pakistan, Nigeria), which hinders national integration and development (Tricontinental, 2025). In the context of Ramakrishna Paramhansa, he was deeply religious but never politicized religion. His spiritual pluralism was inclusive, non-sectarian and apolitical (Tejasananda, 2023). It may be used as model to depoliticize religion but retain spiritual and ethical values in public life. The paper argues that religious conflicts (communal riots, identity politics, persecution of minorities) is hindrance to development, by disrupting social cohesion, diminishing foreign investment, wasting public resources in managing violence, undermining democratic institutions (Tricontinental, 2025). In contrast, developed Western societies with strong legal protection for freedom of religion and separation of religion and politics can be much better platforms for inclusive development.

This theoretical framework amalgamates spiritual philosophy with political and development theory by arguing that the Ramakrishna Paramhansa's paradigm of religious harmony can become a force for religious tolerance, reduce sectarian conflict, and therefore also serve as a tool for sustainable development especially in post-colonial, religiously nationalist, yet underdeveloped parts of the world (Paul & Singh, 2023). It is in this way that by moving towards ethical pluralism and spiritual inclusivity, the contemporary world can take a crucial step toward peace and prosperity.

3. Statement of Purpose

While the world stands divided on the lines of religion, intolerance, and intra-religious violence, Ramakrishna Paramhansa's philosophy comes as a beacon of hope to restore peace and co-existence in this modern age (Tapasyananda, 2022). This study, therefore, attempts to

take the idea of Ramakrishna of harmony of religion as a philosophy and an ethics to address the contemporary situation of religious tension. His experiential acceptance of all religions (he adopted Hinduism, Islam, and Christianity in his spiritual life stands as an example of inter-religious respect and mutual understanding (Tapasyananda, 2022). The study also examines as to how the practical impact of religious intolerance affects the developmental trajectory of a nation, especially in developing Global- South countries. Religious atrocities, inter-communal riots, persecutions of religious minorities, politicization of religion create deep divisions in the society. Religious tensions undermine national unity, economic well-being, and social trust which are indispensable to development. Certain countries which are suffering from religious conflicts have experienced slowed down infrastructural and educational reforms, reduced foreign investments and tourism, migration and psychological trauma, and weakened democratic institutions. In contrast to this, developed Western countries have largely managed to institutionalize the separation of religion and state, where religious plurality is constitutionally guaranteed and public policy is based on secular ethics. This has created a stable and inclusive development.

This paper suggests that while secularism has its advantages, a rooted spiritual pluralism epitomized by Ramakrishna can supplement secular governance by maintaining values, tolerance, and unity in diversity from within. His philosophy provides a cultural alternative to both religious fundamentalism and radical secularism. Drawing from development theory, postmodernism, and interfaith studies, this paper aims to locate Ramakrishna's spiritual pluralism as a practicable means of restoring ruptured societies, eliminating religious conflicts, and providing a conducive atmosphere for development through peace and tolerance.

This paper aims to attain the following objectives:

1. To study the basic philosophical and spiritual teachings of Ramakrishna Paramhansa with special emphasis on his views about the harmony of all religions.
2. To study how Ramakrishna's experiential model of religious pluralism—through his practice of Islam, Christianity and Hinduism—represent a unique religious mosaic.
3. To study Ramakrishna's concept of religious harmony in the historical and socio-cultural milieu of 19th century colonial India, and its relevance in the religious trajectory of the modern world.
4. To study Ramakrishna's inclusive spiritual model as a possible solution to address the issues of religious intolerance, communal violence and sectarian polarization prevalent in South Asia, the Middle East, and in the West.
5. To study the influence of Ramakrishna's teachings on the modern day religious leaders, interfaith movements and peace and religious coexistence organizations and also critically study the challenges and limitations of the application of the spiritual models, such as Ramakrishna's philosophy, in the secular, political and conflict environments, and suggestions for its possible adaptation.

4. Life and Teachings of Ramakrishna Paramhansa

4.1. Early Life

Ramakrishna Paramhansa was born as Gadadhar Chattopadhyay on 18th February, 1836, in the village of Kamarpukur in the Hooghly District of Bengal (Tapasyananda, 2022). He was born into a poor Brahmin family, his father, Khudiram Chattopadhyay, was a modest priest in the village, and his early spiritual tendencies were greatly influenced by his mother, Chandramani Devi, who was a devout woman (Tejasananda, 2023). Gadadhar had a remarkable spiritual

temperament since early age. He was not interested in games or earthly pursuits like other kids were; instead, he would spend a lot of time thinking about the Divine and trying to figure out what life was all about (Tejasananda, 2023). A close emotional bond with the divine and religious devotion had a profound impact on Ramakrishna's early life. At an early age, he began to have spiritual experiences, and his deep love for God became a recurring motif in his life.

He was very calm in nature, and did not like bread-earning subjects like mathematics (Tejasananda, 2023). He indulged in studying the lives of spiritual heroes and sometimes so intent upon the study of those subjects that he forgot all about the material world and entered into a state of trance (Tejasananda, 2023). As he grew older he would sometimes have trances whenever religious ideas were awakened in his heart (Tejasananda, 2023). Soon it was found that it was not only religious subjects, but also beautiful scenery or some touching incident would cause him to lose himself.

4.2. Spiritual Practices and Experiences

After the death of his father in 1843, Ramakrishna went to Calcutta with his elder brother Ramkumar. It was about three years after the arrival of Ramakrishna at Calcutta in 1855 that a great temple of Kali was built at Dakshineswar, which was destined to be the scene where the limitless spiritual potentialities of Ramakrishna would unfold (Sheena, 2016). The temple was built by a rich, pious, and charitable lady, Rani Rasmani, at a place divinely chosen. He was initially appointed as the assistant priest and later on, as the chief assistant in the shrine of Mother Kali under his elder brother (Tejasananda, 2023). After the death of his elder brother in 1856, Ramakrishna was appointed as the principal priest in the Mother's shrine (Tejasananda, 2023).

A pivotal moment in Ramakrishna's life occurred when he began his priesthood in the Mother's shrine. Ramakrishna had already entered a state of intense concentration and ecstasy at the very utterance of the sacred syllables in his ear while he was being trained for the responsibilities of a temple priest and initiated into the Divine Mother's name. Ramakrishna's introspective spiritual experiences and the ensuing dramatic shift in his perspective on life were the cause of all the odd behavioral abnormalities. The subject of whether the Deity, who is worshiped and prayed to, is real was brought to his attention by the temple's daily worship of the image of the Deity. Or is it just a fantasy (Tapasyananda, 2022)? For him, this subject was neither just traditional, as for common people, nor simply logical, as for rationalists. As the days passed, it became a question of life and death. A human being has three hungers: the hunger of the heart, the hunger of the stomach, and the hunger of sex. Like animals, only the first two hungers are active in worldly-minded individuals, and the third is almost nonexistent (Sheena, 2016). The third appears occasionally in a few, but in Ramakrishna, it became the one consistent and dominant drive, so strong that it smothered the other two in him (Sheena, 2022).

4.3. Realisation of Truth

Ramakrishna Paramhansa had a profoundly mystical, intuitive, and experienced epiphany. Beyond the conventional bounds of religious theory and philosophy, his perception of the ultimate truth was born out of direct, personal spiritual experiences rather than being theoretical or intellectual (Tejasananda, 2023). He believed that God is real, intimate, and experienceable and that the highest truth can only be attained through deep devotion, self-surrender, and direct communication with the Divine. He came to the conclusion that all religions lead to the same Divine because his understanding of truth was not limited to the limitations of any one religion rather crossed over into other faiths (Tapasyananda, 2022). Truth, for Ramakrishna, was something to be felt, seen, experienced in the moments of divine ecstasy, visionary revelations,

and intimate communion with the Divine. Ramakrishna's deep devotion to Mother Kali, whom he revered as the human form of the Divine, was the source of his early experiences and insights. Through his intense devotion, Tantric exercises, and Bhakti Yoga, he was able to have a direct and palpable experience of God (Tapasyananda, 2022).

His experimentation with the non-Hindu religions of Islam and Christianity is another noteworthy aspect of his life. A Sufi mystic named Govinda, a Hindu who converted to Islam, initiated him into the faith in 1866 (Tapasyananda, 2022). With the same fervor he displayed in the sadhanas of the Hindu cults, he embraced the practices of this school of mystic Islam.

He also tried christian devotional traditions, particularly devotion to Jesus Christ. He came to understand that the Divine love he encountered in Hinduism was the same Divine power he experienced in Christianity as a result of his meditations on Christ's life, participation in Christian rites, and spiritual visions of Christ. He came to see Christianity as a legitimate route to God as a result of his intense love to Christ (Tejasananda, 2023). Ramakrishna also regarded Buddha as an Incarnation of the Lord and considered his teachings to be similar to that of the Upanishads. He also revered the Tirthankaras of the Jains. Ramakrishna's practice of different religions and his realisation that there are 'as many ways as there are religions' are of great importance to humanity, as they give a solution to the problem posed by religious plurality (Tapasyananda, 2022). It should also be noted that his method frees religious cosmopolitanism from the charge of religious indifferentism, which is really the idea in the minds of most of those who speak on this subject (Tapasyananda, 2022).

4.4. Teachings

The eternal philosophy of Vedanta was lived by Sri Ramakrishna rather than taught as a rigid concept. But his words were not delivered in the form of learned writings, lectures, or discourses, but as informal conversations with devotees who flocked to him. Mahendranath Gupta, one of his talented lay disciples, maintained a diary which consisted of all those conversations and later on wrote the famous 'The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna' under the pen name M—a pseudonym he chose. Otherwise these conversations would have been lost to humanity (Tapasyananda, 2022).

Ramakrishna preached that fundamentally, reality is an intelligence principle. In many religions around the world, this one Intelligent Principle is referred to by many names, such as God, Allah, Buddha, Siva, Vishnu, Brahman, etc. It is both impersonal and personal, possessing and lacking characteristics (Tejasananda, 2023). Being impersonal does not imply being less than personal; rather, it means not being constrained by personality traits. In its cosmic aspect, reality is closely tied to the universe of living and non-living beings as their Cause, Support, and Substratum, even if it transcends all relationships in its absolute nature. The Intelligent Principle is referred to in this context as He or She, the universe's Father or Mother. Both the jivas (living beings) and the jagat (non-living entities), are the manifestations of this Father-Mother Divinity, which is the source alike of what is pleasing and what is terrible in Nature (Tapasyananda, 2022). According to Ramakrishna, one of the most important prerequisites for a spiritual life is strength because sin is weakness and virtue is strength. All strength comes from faith, both faith in God and faith in oneself. The implication of the Ramakrishna's statement that there are as many paths as there are faiths is very much different. It implies that a Hindu, or a Christian, or a Muslim must each follow his own religion most devotedly, but also at the same time accept the validity of all religions other than his own (Tapasyananda, 2022). It is not a question of a mere patronising toleration of others, but acceptance of the correctness of the others' path as much as one's own (Tapasyananda, 2022).

It is not toleration but mutual acceptance that the Master's teachings demand (Tapasyananda, 2022).

5. Idea of Religious Harmony

5.1. Idea of Religious Harmony as Mentioned in Upanishads

The Upanishads' concept of religious harmony demonstrates a profound comprehension of the unity of all things and the interconnection of all spiritual paths. The non-dual nature of reality is emphasized in the Upanishads, ancient writings that are essential to Hindu philosophy. They imply that all creatures, all religions, and all paths ultimately lead to the same fundamental truth.

Brahman, the ultimate truth, is the same in everything, according to one of the Upanishads' most significant lessons. Brahman is described as formless, infinite, and all-pervading in the Upanishads. Brahman is seen as the essence of everything, transcending the boundaries of name, form, and concept, even if many religious traditions may have different names or ideas about the divine (Sheena, 2016). This implies that, despite their various descriptions, all religions ultimately aim to discover the same truth.

According to the Rig Veda 1.164.46, "Ekam sat vipra bahudha vadanti" means "Truth is one, the wise call it by various names (Wilson, 1850). Since this concept emphasizes the universality of truth, many religious practices and beliefs are viewed as divergent routes that ultimately lead to the same destination.

According to the Upanishads, Brahman, the universal soul or ultimate reality, and Atman, the individual soul or self, are one and the same. According to this fundamental principle, which is called Tat Tvam Asi ("That Thou Art"), each and every human being possesses the same divine essence (Lokeshwarananda, n.d.). The person overcomes ego and understands that all beings are interconnected by realizing this oneness. This concept encourages religious tolerance and respect for all living things because it recognizes the divine in everyone, regardless of their faith background. According to Chandogya Upanishad 6.8.7, "Tat Tvam Asi" states that "You are that"—the individual soul is not distinct from the universal soul (Lokeshwarananda, n.d.). The Upanishads oppose the idea of a single, exclusive route to enlightenment. Rather, they convey a diversified view of spirituality. Every person's path, whether through meditation, ritual, or devotion, can lead to the same truth, according to the Upanishadic viewpoint, which recognizes that different people are at different phases of their spiritual journey. This idea promotes tolerance and acceptance of various spiritual traditions, which in turn promotes religious concord.

5.2. Paramhansa's Way of Understanding Religious Harmony

Paramhansa's greatest contribution to the modern world torn by theological quarrel is the harmony of religions. Ritual, mythology, and philosophy, are the three stages of any major ancient religion. Religion and mythology are the externals of religion and philosophy is the basic. It is impossible for mythology and rituals to be consistent. These are philosophy's abstract concepts. It is made tangible so that the ordinary person may understand it. According to Paramhansa, life as such leads the way to religion and religion is reality (Sheena, 2016). The spirit of religion is understood by the spirit of the modern man. A good religion creates a new universe, which is the eternal bond between the eternal God and the eternal soul. The true experience is his religion. The pursuit of spiritual experience or fulfillment is the end objective of all faiths.

The spiritual ideal harmony of religions and spiritualization are the humanistic impulses of his life and to him each soul is potentially divine (Sheena, 2016). It can be seen that his religious harmony, is not merely, the social customs and external observance, but it is the process of inner growth known as spiritual development (Sheena, 2016). Through this spiritualism man overcomes all his problems and evils and he goes beyond all limitations and also earns and attains supreme fulfillment and immortality which is the eternal principle of Vedanta (Sheena, 2016). He believed that the God and soul are one. According to him, when man is served God is served, that is “Madhava seva Manava seva” (Sheena, 2016). Ramakrishna’s principle of harmony of religion profound the realization of oneness or ultimate reality, each and every religion is essential part of world, the same one is used in different ways. The one God is known by different names.

6. Religious Intolerance Across the Globe

6.1. Historical Background of Religious Intolerance

Throughout human history, religious intolerance has taken many different shapes, frequently as a result of the intricate interactions between social, political, cultural, and economic elements. It is a situation in which people or groups face prejudice, persecution, or marginalization because of their identities, behaviors, or religious convictions. Religious intolerance dates back to ancient civilizations and has developed over time, frequently driven by identity politics, power struggles, and dogmatic views. Other gods were generally accepted in polytheistic civilizations like those in ancient Mesopotamia and Egypt, but rejection of the state gods or worship of foreign deities resulted in punishment or excommunication (Carter, 2009). Despite being mostly polytheistic and initially accepting of several Gods, the Greek and Roman civilizations turned into intolerant ones when their religious beliefs were perceived as subversive to the political order (Beard et al, 1998). The idea of religious exclusivity gained traction when monotheistic religions like Judaism, Christianity, and Islam gained popularity. Conflicts with other belief systems resulted from these religion’s frequent teaching that their way was the only real way to salvation.

There was a great deal of religious intolerance and violence during the medieval era, especially in Europe and the Middle East (Carter, 2009). The Crusades were a series of military operations launched by the Catholic Church with the goal of freeing Jerusalem and the Holy Land from Muslim rule (Carter, 2009). Widespread violence, the uprooting of religious groups, and the murder of Jews, Muslims, and even Christians who held different theological beliefs were all consequences of these battles. The Crusades were not merely military campaigns ,they were religiously inspired campaigns that demonstrated and reinforced religious intolerance on an unprecedented scale. Launched by the Latin Church under the banner of "holy war," the Crusades contributed to the institutionalization of religious violence, the polarization of faiths, and construction of rigid religious identities (Cartwright, 2018). Their impact reverberated across centuries, influencing Christian-Muslim relations, attitudes toward Jews, and broader notions of religious exclusivism and supremacy (Cartwright, 2018).

The Islamic Caliphates, during the Abbasid period (750–1258) in particular, are often remembered for their intellectual brilliance, cosmopolitan culture, and administrative innovation (Khan, 2019). But when explored through the prism of religious intolerance, the same period is an interwoven tapestry of tolerance and repression, pluralism and persecution, wielded by political power, theological orthodoxy, and sectarian rivalry. Caliphate (“*Khilafat*” in Arabic) was a semi-religious political system of governance in Islam, in which the territories of the Islamic empire in the Middle East and North Africa and the people within were ruled by a supreme leader called Caliph (“*Khalifa*” in Arabic – meaning successor) (Khan, 2019).

The Islamic caliphate was a system where **tolerance was conditional, intolerance institutionalized, and religious identity closely tied to political power (Khan, 2019).**

Religious intolerance increased during the early modern era as a result of European colonization and state-sponsored religious persecution. Religious intolerance changed in the modern era, and religious disputes were significantly shaped by both the emergence of nationalism and enlightened ideas. Religious intolerance still exists in the twenty-first century in a various forms, ranging from attacks on Buddhists or Hindu minorities in various parts of the world to Islamophobia, anti-Semitism, and persecution of Christians.

It is in this context of historical and contemporary religious tensions that the legacy of Ramakrishna Paramhansa emerges as a beacon of hope and transformation. Unlike many religious philosophers who worked solely within their own tradition, Ramakrishna embraced multiple faiths, experiencing and practicing the spiritual essence of each religion, most prominently Hinduism, Islam, Christianity (Tejasananda, 2023). His conviction that all religions lead to the same ultimate truth is the cornerstone of his idea of religious harmony. Ramakrishna's philosophy of spirituality provides a rebuttal to religious exclusivism. His famous preaching—"Yato mat, tato path" (as many beliefs, so many paths) challenges the notion that only one religion holds the key to salvation (Tejasananda, 2023). But this inclusivity is not only intellectual but experiential, Ramakrishna personally lived the tenets of different religions and found same divine truth in all. Through this practice, he demonstrated that religious identity need not be a source of conflict but a bridge to unity (Tapasyananda, 2022). In the contemporary world, where religious tensions often intersect with political ideologies and identity-based movements, Ramakrishna's idea of religious harmony serves as a guiding light. It encourages individuals and societies to transcend mere tolerance and emphasizes on passive acceptance, towards active understanding, mutual respect, and spiritual empathy.

6.2. Politicization of Religion

The use of religious concepts, symbols, organizations, or communities for political ends—such as establishing political power, influencing public policy, or furthering specific national, ethnic, or ideological agendas—is known as the politicization of religion. This intricate phenomena has a long history and still influences world politics today. Both governmental and non-state actors, such as political figures, political parties, social movements, and even religious organizations themselves, may be involved. The politicization of religion is not limited to any one faith or region. It has manifested across different religious traditions, including Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Judaism, and in a variety of political contexts.

But when religion becomes political, its spiritual core can occasionally be perverted to further goals that transcend moral or theological considerations, with grave repercussions for both individuals and society.

Politicization of religion existed during the ancient times also like one important political factor was Christianity (medieval Europe), especially through the Catholic Church. Conflicts between secular and church authorities were frequent, and the Pope frequently had more authority than kings and emperors (Beard et al, 1998). Religion was essential to preserving the legitimacy of the Pharaoh (ancient Egypt), who was regarded as both a political leader and a divine being (Beard et al, 1998).

The politicization of religion has emerged as a more significant and frequently divisive factor in contemporary history, particularly as countries started drawing clearer lines between politics and religion (Carter, 2009). One of the main types of politicized religion is religious nationalism, which links national identity to religious identity. Sometimes at the expense of

religious or ethnic minorities, this can result in the perception that a specific religious group is the legitimate or "authentic" citizens of a country. Political regimes also occasionally incorporate religion into their governmental machinery, reshaping national identity and policies in accordance with religious principles. Religious minority also experience marginalization or oppression by dominant political or religious group as a means of political mobilization and a push for increased autonomy or rights. Ethnic and sectarian conflicts are frequently exacerbated by politicized religion.

6.3. Religious Tensions Across the Globe

Historical, sociopolitical, cultural, and economic considerations all play a part in the complex phenomena of religious tensions in India and around the world. Violence, prejudice, and social disintegration have frequently resulted from these tensions. While religion continues to play a significant role in forming personal identity and communal values in the modern world, it has also become highly politicized, fueling internal and international conflicts.

The emergence of Islamophobia in Western nations, especially in Europe and North America, has been one of the most obvious religious conflicts in recent years. Terrorism (such as the September 11 attacks and ISIS), migration, and concerns over cultural identity in the face of expanding Muslim populations in nations like the US, France, and the UK are some of the causes of this tension (Gerges, 2022). One of the horrendous instances of religious persecution, especially against Christians, has occurred in the Middle East. Due to attacks by extreme organizations like ISIS and governments that use religion as a tool to stay in power, the number of Christians has significantly decreased in several nations (Gerges, 2022).

Sri Ramakrishna's spiritual path—and the pluralistic Vedanta framework he inspired—can offer a valuable alternative to address tensions like Islamophobia in the West and Christian persecution in the Middle East. That's because Ramakrishna directly experienced that Hinduism, Islam, and Christianity are different yet equally valid paths to the same ultimate divine reality (Sheena, 2016). Through this lived pluralism—in which he personally practiced multiple faith traditions and saw the same God under different names—he pioneered a uniquely spiritual "harmony of religions" far beyond the secular notions of religious tolerance or cultural assimilation (Tejasananda, 2023). Unlike approaches based on political identity, fear, or legal framework, his approach centers on recognizing the divine in every person (*jiva is Shiva*), and treating others, with selfless love and service as forms of sacred practice (Sheena, 2016). This could fundamentally transform the relational dynamics so that the Muslims and Christians do not consider each other as enemies or threats, rather as fellow seekers following different yet converging spiritual paths.

Religious conflicts are frequently linked to ethnic conflict, economic hardships, and the effects of colonialism in Africa, especially in nations like Nigeria, Sudan, Somalia, and the Central African Republic. A lot of violence has been committed by organizations like Boko Haram in Nigeria and Al-Shabaab in Somalia, which target not just government buildings but also religious minorities like Christians and moderate Muslims (Duyile et al, 2020). These extremist organizations frequently use religious beliefs to defend their acts of violence, which feeds a vicious circle of retaliation and persecution.

Turkey, historically known as secular state created by Mustafa Kemet Atatürk, has seen a growing intertwining of religion and politics, which has elicited criticism both at domestic and global levels, and deepening internal religious tensions (Bishai, 2024). Under President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and his Justice and Development Party (AKP), there has been a re-Islamization of public life, and the targeting of religious minorities and nonconformist Islamic groups (Bishai, 2024). The conversion of Hagia Sophia back into a mosque in 2020—represent a shift

away from secular pluralism toward a Sunni-Islamic national identity, and religious polarization (Stanicek, 2020). Turkey's case illustrates how religion, when politicized along with authoritarianism, can be used to undermine democracy, marginalize minorities, and exacerbate religious tensions, both within and across borders. The 2021 Report of "Hate Crimes in Turkey Based on Religion, Belief or Unbelief" by the Freedom of Belief Initiative of the Norwegian Helsinki Committee was released in September (Bulut, 2022). The report documented 29 hate crimes or incidents related to religion, belief or non-belief between January and December 2021 (Bulut, 2022). The victims are Alevis, Christians, Jews, and atheists (Bulut, 2022). Turkey reflects a broader global trend in which religious identity is manipulated for political consolidation and exclusion.

While it is a constitutionally secular country with a large majority Muslim population, Bangladesh has a long history of coexistence with other communities (Hasnat & Mashal, 2021). However, anti-Hindu violence has been an enduring issue, reflecting deeper social, political, and religious rifts. Hindus, who comprise around 8–10% of the population, had long been subject to discrimination, intimidation, and violence, especially during the political upheaval and religious mobilization (Human rights watch, 2021). One example was the violence in October 2021, which erupted during the Hindu festival of Durga puja after a social media post alleged desecration of Quran at a temple (Amnesty International, 2021). This led to mob attacks on hindu temples, homes and businesses across several districts (Amnesty International, 2021).

"Violence erupted in Bangladesh following allegations on social media that a copy of the Quran, the holy book of Islam, was desecrated at a puja pandal (temporary structures made for the religious ceremony) in Cumilla on 13 October 2021. At least seven people have been killed, and hundreds have been injured in clashes that broke out across Bangladesh since 13 October" (Amnesty International, 2021). In the year 2024, Bangladesh witnessed the increasing rate of violence against its Hindu minority, especially after the resignation of the Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina on 5th August, 2024, following the political turmoil (Mohan, 2024). The absence of Prime Minister and immediate power vacuum created a fertile ground for communal violence against religious minorities, particularly the Hindus (Singh, 2024). The attack seemed to be planned- it began with the disruption of traffic by the nationalists (Singh, 2024). According to the Bangladesh Hindu Buddhist Christian Unity Council, there has been a surge of more than 2000 incidents of violence that include the desecration of 152 temples and destruction of houses and businesses of Hindu families in 27 districts in the country between August 4 and 20, 2024 (AP News, 2024). The violence was often fuelled by the rumours, such as blasphemy of the Prophet Mohammad and the presence of the political force, and it escalated by the absence of law enforcement due to the police strike (The Indian Express, 2025). The anti Hindu violence in Bangladesh in 2024 is indeed a reflection of the melancholic relationship existing between politics and religion, which puts minority communities at risk especially during uprisings periods of a country (The Daily Star, 2024).

Ramakrishna's philosophy could have offered a profoundly different paradigm for the anti-Hindu violence and communal rifts in Bangladesh, not least in the circumstances from the turbulence of August 2024. His pluralism was based on experience, not mere tolerance or political pluralism, which emphasized the unity of humanity at the most profound level, beneath cultural and linguistic differences (Sheena, 2016). In situations of rumour-motivated mob violence against Hindus over Durga Puja or the total power vacuum of August 2024, Ramakrishna's model would have caused a shift from fear-driven communal targeting to spiritual recognition of common humanity and the divine presence in all. Ramakrishna's philosophy opposed weaponizing religious identity for political purposes, and emphasizes on selfless service and compassion, as he preached that service to fellow human beings is not

charity but worship, as embodied in the principle “Atmano mokshartham jagat hitaya cha” (“for personal liberation and the welfare of the world”), thus creating an interfaith empathy and resilient communal harmony through the transformation of the inner self, in which communities choose mutual respect and recognition over suspicion, instead of perpetuating cycles of escalation shaped by religious nationalism and so deal with the roots of violence rather than the symptoms (Tejasananda, 2023).

The Middle East has long been a powder keg. This time, however, the conflict is more than just strategic or military; it is religious as well. This conflict began in June 2025 with Israel launching airstrikes on Iranian nuclear and military facilities under Operation Rising Lion as a means to negate a national security threat soon turned into a full-scale war (Perera & Lau, 2025). Iran responded by, launching missiles and drones on Israeli cities such as Tel Aviv and Beersheba in their own Operation True Promise III, with civilian infrastructure such as hospitals also falling victim to their attacks (Unnithan, 2025). The conflict has drawn worldwide attention and condemnation. But what the conflict has really been about is religion. Both sides have deep-seated religious and ideological differences. Iran, a Shia Islamic theocracy, views Israel as not just a political but a religious threat (Al Jazeera, 2025). Iranian leadership, including Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei, have framed their hostility as a theological one as well (Al Jazeera, 2025). Israel, being a Jewish state, sees such hostility as attacks on their religious and national identity (Perera and Lau, 2025). Both countries have long tangled their religion up with nationalism, turning faith into a cause for war. This conflict has revealed the urgent need for religious tolerance towards world issues. It highlights how, if religion is used for political motives, creates hatred and separation and also encourages how understanding and respect between religions can help diffuse tensions and build bridges to peace (Unnithan, 2025). The 2025 conflict reveals that without tolerance and respect between religions, religion becomes easily manipulated as an instrument of war rather than unity and healing.

Religious disputes have existed throughout India's history and persist today due to the country's great religious variety (Arlen, 2023). These conflicts frequently stem from sociopolitical processes, historical legacies, and the intricate relationship between nationalism and religion. From the time of Muslim rule in India (from the Delhi Sultanate to the Mughal Empire) to the 1947 partition of India, which resulted in the creation of the religiously separate countries of India and Pakistan, the relationship between Hindus and Muslims in India has always been tense (Arlen, 2023). Horrible communal violence followed partition, and the effects of this violence may still be seen in India today. In India, the Sikh community has also experienced conflict, especially after the 1984 anti-Sikh riots that were triggered by Prime Minister Indira Gandhi's assassination by her Sikh bodyguards (Arlen, 2023). Many Sikhs believe that the state has sidelined them, particularly in light of Punjab's demands for autonomy. India have also witnessed a series of communal violence and religious tensions in the recent times such as the Nagpur communal unrest in March 2025, regarding the demands of the right wing Hindu organizations to remove the tomb of Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb ; Communal violence broke out in Bahraich, Uttar Pradesh in 2024, after the murder of a hindu person which led to riots, demolition of property etc ; Riots during Ram Navami procession in 2024 in Murshidabad, West bengal ; protests by Muslims in states like West Bengal, Tripura, and Kerala against the Waqf bill in 2025 resulted in widespread communal violence and religious tensions ; Pahalgam, Kashmir terrorist attack in 2025 on the basis of religion.

Against this background, Ramakrishna Paramhansa's message of religious harmony seems like a timely antidote. By experientially validating Islam, Christianity and Hindu traditions, he showed that no single creed has a monopoly on the truth, and that spiritual unity lies behind doctrinal diversity (Tejasananda, 2023). Ramakrishna's philosophy offers a spiritually

pluralistic model that can help heal wounds, reduce extremism, and re-orient inter-religious relations toward empathy, shared divinity and lived harmony (Sheena, 2016). Since today's religious intolerance often facilitates social fragmentation and humanitarian crises, re-discovering the life and teachings of Ramakrishna is no longer simply a moral imperative, but also a practical measure for promoting peace, inclusion and resilience in diverse societies.

7. Path towards Harmony

7.1. Peaceful Coexistence

The ability of people of various religious beliefs to cohabit peacefully means that they can do so without causing conflict, violence, or prejudice. This idea encompasses more than just tolerance; it also involves respect for one another, comprehension, and acceptance of different religious traditions. More broadly, it refers to establishing an accepting society in which everyone's rights are upheld, regardless of their religion beliefs, and religious diversity is honored. When it comes to religion, peaceful coexistence entails acknowledging that no one religion should rule or oppress another and that people need to be allowed to follow their beliefs without worrying about discrimination or persecution. Prejudices, biases, and stereotypes based on religious differences must be overcome in order to achieve this vision of cohabitation, which places an emphasis on harmony, communication, and a dedication to human dignity.

7.2. Practices Done Before and Now to Attain Peaceful Coexistence

It takes both institutional and grassroots efforts to bring various faith communities together in harmony. Many practical initiatives, both in the past and present, have been focused on promoting peace and lowering religious tensions. One of the most crucial methods for attaining peaceful cohabitation has been interfaith discussion. In order to promote collaboration, respect, and understanding between individuals from various religious origins, this entails communication. In order to foster religious tolerance and harmonious coexistence, education is essential. People can be taught the importance of accepting variety, comprehending the views of others, and the perils of prejudice and intolerance through both religious and secular education.

In order to make peaceful cohabitation, politics and the law play a critical role. In order to manage religious plurality and foster peaceful coexistence, secular government, the equitable application of the law, and the implementation of human rights guarantees are crucial (Hick, 1997).

The origin of the practices to attain the goal of peaceful coexistence can be traced back to the time of Emperor Ashoka when he promoted the Dhamma (moral law), religious tolerance, and non violence, across Mauryan empire. These teachings laid moral foundations for attainment of peaceful coexistence. Mughal Emperor Akbar also advocated the “Sulh e kul” which meant (peace with all) which emphasized religious pluralism and tolerance.

The 20th century has witnessed the institutionalization of peace through the League of Nations, United Nations, international laws and treaties. In the 21st century practices such as multilateralism and cooperation, interfaith and intercultural dialogues, peace education, digital diplomacy and social movements, and community based conflict resolution have been adopted to attain the goal of peaceful coexistence in the contemporary world.

8. Role of Swami Vivekananda in Promoting Ideas of Ramakrishna Paramhansa

The harmonious cohabitation of individuals who adhere to several faith traditions is referred to as religious harmony. Mutual respect, understanding, and the acceptance of the truth in all religions are at stake, not the blending or weakening of religious ideas. Despite doctrinal differences, religious harmony holds that various religions may coexist and share ideals like love, compassion, truth, and self-realization.

One of the most venerated religious leaders in contemporary India, Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa, was steadfast in his belief that all religions should coexist. His most well-known disciple, Swami Vivekananda, was greatly influenced by his teachings on religious harmony, which became one of the main tenets of the Ramakrishna Order (Nikhilananda, 2010). Intellectual or philosophical grounds alone were not the foundation of Ramakrishna's conception of religious harmony. It was based on his own spiritual experiences while pursuing several theological trajectories. He came to perceive that, despite their seeming differences in practice, various religions were ultimately leading to the same heavenly truth (Tejasananda, 2023). Ramakrishna's ideas were revolutionary because he promoted religious harmony and tolerance during a period when India was sharply divided along religious lines. His own encounters with various religions dismantled the barriers of hatred and religious exclusivism. He urged his followers to recognize the divine nature in all religious traditions and underlined the value of respecting other faiths. The ultimate truth, according to Ramakrishna, transcends religion itself, and religious rites and doctrines are merely means to spiritual enlightenment (Tapasyananda, 2022).

Ramakrishna's disciple, Swami Vivekananda emerged as the leading proponent for his master's doctrine. Throughout the world, he promoted religious harmony and universal spirituality (Nikhilananda, 2010). Vivekananda's goal was to advance social reform, spirituality, and independence in addition to religious harmony (Tejasananda, 2017). The Ramakrishna Mission, an organization that aims not only to spread Ramakrishna's teachings but also convert these spiritual insights into practical social service, was one of Vivekananda's most important accomplishments. The Ramakrishna Mission embodies the notion that social welfare and spiritual enlightenment are interrelated and complementary, offering a distinctive fusion of spirituality and service (Tejasananda, 2017). According to Swami Vivekananda, this mission is a means of achieving Ramakrishna's universal vision of truth, which holds that self-realization is the ultimate aim of human existence and that it must be sought while meeting people's bodily, spiritual, and social needs (Nikhilananda, 2010). For the Ramakrishna Mission and Indian spirituality, Swami Vivekananda's 1893 address to the Parliament of the World's Religions in Chicago was a turning point (Vivekananda, 1893). The mission received considerable international attention as a result of Vivekananda's message of universalism and religious tolerance striking a chord with people all across the world. The world's spiritual landscape has been significantly impacted by Vivekananda's vision of religious harmony and his claim that spirituality transcends national and religious boundaries (Tejasananda, 2017). Just as Ramakrishna had lived a life of selflessness, discipline, and service, Swami Vivekananda aimed to establish a society of committed spiritual workers. He established the Ramakrishna Order, a community of monks dedicated to the principles of self-realization and humanitarian service, in order to accomplish this (Nikhilananda, 2010).

Ramakrishna's beliefs in social service, religious harmony, and the universality of spiritual truth served as the foundation for Swami Vivekananda's concept of the Ramakrishna Mission. Selfless service, the harmony of all religions, and the advancement of human civilization were at the heart of Vivekananda's attempts to spread Ramakrishna's teachings.

9. Conclusion

To conclude, Ramakrishna Paramhansa's understanding of religious harmony is both novel and deeply relevant in generating religious tolerance in an ever more plural and divided world. Unlike abstract theorising, Ramakrishna's approach of religious harmony was founded on experienced mystical experience that reaffirmed the fundamental unity of all religions. In his view, the different religions are means by which we can reach the same divine reality. It was both inclusive and experiential. It did not compromise on the essential distinctiveness but refused to be sectarian or exclusivist. It was not a framework for one religious tradition to dominate and be hierarchically superior to others. Many other spiritual leaders and reformers also attempted to attain inter religious understanding. But most of them were inclined towards dogmatic universalism or remained idealist and impractical. While Ramakrishna's philosophy stood out for its simplicity, moderation, pragmatism and lived relevance. It did not require any theological reconciliation or doctrinal compromise instead, it was based on the experience of the same spiritual truth across traditions. In today's globalized and multicultural world, much of the religious violence and intolerance is often a consequence of religion becoming subsumed by politicized identities and socio-economic hierarchies. In this context, Ramakrishna's teachings provides not only grounded but also profound spiritual alternative.

This enlightened attitude envisions a society where the common humanity and divine essence behind all faiths are recognized, leading to the possibility of inter-religious fellow-feeling, mutual co-existence, and all round development. Ramakrishna's message has been disseminated around the world by his greatest disciple Swami Vivekananda, who worked tirelessly to encourage people to accept religious diversity and recognize the divine in all people, regardless of their faith. By practicing both spiritual and social service, the Ramakrishna Mission—which Vivekananda founded—continues to fulfill this vision by actively reducing social inequity and promoting religious tolerance. By combining the values of love, compassion and service, the mission actively seeks to bridge religious divides and promote human unity.

Ramakrishna's pluralistic spirituality thus offers a pragmatic, culturally resonant, and morally authoritative way of building religious tolerance in the contemporary world. In a world wracked by the tensions of religious diversity, his message is a call to reimagine interreligious relations, not as a source of division, but as a site for solidarity and shared spiritual growth. His legacy testifies that religious tolerance is not only a political ideal but a social reality that can be achieved by respecting and recognizing others as having equal spiritual worth.

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