



## Ramakrishna's Teachings on the Nature of Reality: A Comparative Analysis with Other Philosophical Traditions

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### ABSTRACT

In the realm of philosophical inquiry, few thinkers have ventured as deeply into the mysteries of existence as Ramakrishna Paramahansa. This paper embarks on an exploratory journey through Ramakrishna's teachings on the nature of reality, navigating the complex tapestry of his ideas and juxtaposing them with the philosophical traditions of Advaita Vedanta, Western philosophy, and Buddhism. Through a comparative analysis of Ramakrishna's teachings with these traditions, this paper distills the essence of his philosophical insights, revealing a nuanced and multifaceted understanding of the nature of reality. The paper also probes the practical implications of Ramakrishna's teachings, illuminating their transformative potential for personal growth, spiritual development, and social transformation.

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### Introduction

In the vast and complex landscape of human existence, few questions have captivated the imagination of philosophers, theologians, and seekers of truth as profoundly as the question of the nature of reality. What is the ultimate reality that underlies our experiences, perceptions, and understanding of the world? Is it a unified, all-encompassing consciousness, or a fragmented, multifaceted reality?



For centuries, philosophers and theologians have grappled with these questions, offering a diverse range of perspectives and insights. From the ancient Greeks to modern-day philosophers, the debate has continued, with each contributor adding their unique voice to the conversation.

In the midst of this on-going discussion, the teachings of Ramakrishna Paramahansa, a 19th-century Indian saint and mystic, offer a profound and fascinating perspective on the nature of reality. Through his teachings, Ramakrishna reveals a nuanced and multifaceted understanding of reality, one that integrates the insights of Eastern and Western philosophical traditions.

This paper will explore Ramakrishna's teachings on the nature of reality, examining their implications for our understanding of the world and our place within it. Through a comparative analysis of Ramakrishna's teachings with other philosophical traditions, including Advaita Vedanta, Western philosophy, and Buddhism, this paper will highlight the unique insights and perspectives offered by Ramakrishna, and explore the practical implications of his teachings for personal growth, spiritual development, and social transformation.

By examining Ramakrishna's teachings on the nature of reality, this paper aims to contribute to the on-going conversation about the ultimate reality, and to offer a deeper understanding of the complex and multifaceted nature of existence.

## **Literature Review**

The concept of reality has been a subject of inquiry and debate among philosophers, theologians, and scholars across various disciplines. The literature on this topic is vast and diverse, spanning multiple philosophical traditions, including Eastern and Western thought.

### Advaita Vedanta

Advaita Vedanta, a school of Hindu philosophy, posits that the ultimate reality is a unified, all-encompassing consciousness known as Brahman (Shankara, 1958). According to this tradition, the individual self (Atman) is ultimately identical with Brahman, and the goal of human existence is to realize this unity through spiritual practices and self-inquiry.



## Western Philosophy

In Western philosophy, the concept of reality has been explored through various lenses, including metaphysics, epistemology, and ontology. Philosophers such as Plato (1961) and Kant (1872) have grappled with the nature of reality, proposing theories such as the theory of forms and the distinction between noumena and phenomena.

## Buddhism

Buddhist philosophy offers a distinct perspective on reality, emphasizing the impermanent and interconnected nature of all phenomena (Buddha, 1951). The concept of "emptiness" (shunyata) is central to Buddhist thought, suggesting that all phenomena lack inherent existence and are ultimately empty of independent reality.

## Ramakrishna's Teachings

Ramakrishna's teachings on the nature of reality offer a unique synthesis of Eastern and Western philosophical perspectives. According to Ramakrishna, the nature of reality is a unified, non-dual truth, where the ultimate reality, known as Brahman, can be experienced both as an impersonal, formless Absolute and a personal, loving Divine Mother, with different aspects accessible depending on the devotee's individual perspective and spiritual development; essentially, he saw the world as a manifestation of the divine, with the concept of "Maya" representing the illusory nature of our perception of separation from this ultimate reality

Key points of Ramakrishna's teachings on reality:

- **Unity of all religions:**

He believed that different religions are simply different paths leading to the same God, emphasizing the underlying unity of spiritual experience.

- **Dual aspects of the divine:**



Ramakrishna described the divine as both "Brahman" (the impersonal, absolute reality) and "Kali" (the active, dynamic, and personal aspect of God).

- **Maya as illusion:**

While acknowledging the concept of Maya (illusion) from Vedanta philosophy, Ramakrishna viewed it as a tool for spiritual practice, not a denial of the world's existence.

- **Importance of devotion:**

He emphasized the power of Bhakti Yoga (devotional practice) to realize the divine, encouraging individuals to connect with God through love and surrender.

- **Personal experience:**

Ramakrishna stressed the importance of personal spiritual experience, where one directly realizes the truth of their own divine nature

## **Comparative Analysis**

A comparative analysis of Ramakrishna's teachings with other philosophical traditions reveals both similarities and differences. While Advaita Vedanta and Buddhism share similarities with Ramakrishna's teachings on the nature of reality, Western philosophical traditions offer distinct perspectives on the topic. A deeper examination of these similarities and differences can provide valuable insights into the nature of reality and its implications for human existence.

## **Analysis**

Ramakrishna's teachings on the nature of reality offer a unique and fascinating perspective on the ultimate reality that underlies all existence. Through a comparative analysis of Ramakrishna's teachings with other philosophical traditions, including Advaita Vedanta, Western philosophy, and Buddhism, this paper will examine the key features of Ramakrishna's teachings on reality and explore their implications for our understanding of the world and our place within it.

The Nature of Reality



According to Ramakrishna, the ultimate reality is a unified, all-encompassing consciousness that underlies all existence (Kathamrita, Vol. 1). This reality is beyond human comprehension and can only be experienced through spiritual practices and self-surrender. Ramakrishna's teachings on the nature of reality are similar to those of Advaita Vedanta, which posits that the ultimate reality is a unified, all-encompassing consciousness known as Brahman (Shankara, 1958).

However, Ramakrishna's teachings on reality also differ from those of Advaita Vedanta in significant ways. While Advaita Vedanta emphasizes the importance of intellectual understanding and scriptural study in realizing the ultimate reality, Ramakrishna's teachings emphasize the importance of spiritual practices, such as meditation and devotion, in experiencing the ultimate reality.

### The Role of the Individual

Ramakrishna's teachings on the nature of reality also have significant implications for our understanding of the role of the individual in the world. According to Ramakrishna, the individual self is not separate from the ultimate reality, but is ultimately identical with it (Kathamrita, Vol. 2). This understanding of the individual's role in the world is similar to that of Buddhism, which emphasizes the interconnectedness of all phenomena and the lack of inherent existence of the individual self (Buddha, 1951).

However, Ramakrishna's teachings on the role of the individual also differ from those of Buddhism in significant ways. While Buddhism emphasizes the importance of individual effort and practice in achieving spiritual liberation, Ramakrishna's teachings emphasize the importance of surrendering the individual ego and intellect to the ultimate reality.

### Implications for Spiritual Growth

Ramakrishna's teachings on the nature of reality have significant implications for spiritual growth and self-realization. According to Ramakrishna, the ultimate reality can only be experienced through spiritual practices and self-surrender (Kathamrita, Vol. 3). This understanding of spiritual growth is similar to that of Western philosophy, which emphasizes the importance of individual effort and practice in achieving spiritual liberation.

However, Ramakrishna's teachings on spiritual growth also differ from those of Western philosophy in significant ways. While Western philosophy emphasizes the importance of intellectual understanding



and rational inquiry in achieving spiritual liberation, Ramakrishna's teachings emphasize the importance of spiritual practices, such as meditation and devotion, in experiencing the ultimate reality.

### Comparative Analysis

This section will provide a comparative analysis of Ramakrishna's teachings on the nature of reality with other philosophical traditions, including Advaita Vedanta, Western philosophy, and Buddhism.

### Advaita Vedanta

Advaita Vedanta, a school of Hindu philosophy, posits that the ultimate reality is a unified, all-encompassing consciousness known as Brahman (Shankara, 1958). This reality is beyond human comprehension and can only be experienced through spiritual practices and self-inquiry.

Ramakrishna's teachings on the nature of reality share similarities with Advaita Vedanta. Both traditions emphasize the importance of spiritual practices and self-inquiry in experiencing the ultimate reality. However, Ramakrishna's teachings also differ from Advaita Vedanta in significant ways. While Advaita Vedanta emphasizes the importance of intellectual understanding and scriptural study in realizing the ultimate reality, Ramakrishna's teachings emphasize the importance of spiritual practices, such as meditation and devotion, in experiencing the ultimate reality.

### Western Philosophy

Western philosophy, particularly the tradition of Platonic realism, posits that the ultimate reality is a realm of abstract Forms or Ideas that underlie the imperfect, changing world of sensory experience (Plato, 1961). This reality is accessible through reason and intellectual inquiry.

Ramakrishna's teachings on the nature of reality differ significantly from Western philosophy. While Western philosophy emphasizes the importance of reason and intellectual inquiry in accessing the ultimate reality, Ramakrishna's teachings emphasize the importance of spiritual practices, such as meditation and devotion, in experiencing the ultimate reality.

### Buddhism

Buddhism, particularly the tradition of Mahayana Buddhism, posits that the ultimate reality is a realm of emptiness (shunyata) that underlies all phenomena (Buddha, 1951). This reality is accessible through meditation and the cultivation of wisdom.



Ramakrishna's teachings on the nature of reality share similarities with Buddhism. Both traditions emphasize the importance of meditation and spiritual practices in experiencing the ultimate reality. However, Ramakrishna's teachings also differ from Buddhism in significant ways. While Buddhism emphasizes the importance of individual effort and practice in achieving spiritual liberation, Ramakrishna's teachings emphasize the importance of surrendering the individual ego and intellect to the ultimate reality.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, Ramakrishna's teachings on the nature of reality offer a profound and fascinating perspective on the ultimate reality that underlies all existence. Through a comparative analysis of Ramakrishna's teachings with other philosophical traditions, including Advaita Vedanta, Western philosophy, and Buddhism, this paper has highlighted the similarities and differences between these traditions and Ramakrishna's teachings.

Ramakrishna's teachings on the nature of reality emphasize the importance of spiritual practices, such as meditation and devotion, in experiencing the ultimate reality. His teachings also highlight the importance of surrendering the individual ego and intellect to the ultimate reality, and of cultivating a sense of unity and interconnectedness with all existence.

The implications of Ramakrishna's teachings on the nature of reality are far-reaching and profound. His teachings offer a vision of reality that is holistic, integrated, and sacred, and that emphasizes the importance of spiritual growth and self-realization. His teachings also offer a critique of the dominant Western worldview, which emphasizes the importance of reason and intellectual inquiry, and which often neglects the importance of spiritual practices and self-inquiry.

Ultimately, Ramakrishna's teachings on the nature of reality offer a powerful and transformative vision of the human condition, and of the ultimate reality that underlies all existence. His teachings invite us to embark on a journey of spiritual growth and self-realization, and to cultivate a deeper understanding of the world and our place within it.

## **Final Thoughts**

As we reflect on Ramakrishna's teachings on the nature of reality, we are reminded of the importance of spiritual growth and self-realization in our lives. We are also reminded of the importance of cultivating a



deeper understanding of the world and our place within it, and of embracing a vision of reality that is holistic, integrated, and sacred.

May Ramakrishna's teachings on the nature of reality inspire us to embark on a journey of spiritual growth and self-realization, and may they guide us towards a deeper understanding of the world and our place within it.

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