

Vivekananda' Perspective of Universal Religion: Introspection

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Religion is deeply rooted in man and his blood since many centuries ago. Still it has been dominating man and his way of thinking and behavior. Within the framework of human rights, religion is considered as an inherent and individual right of the man. Therefore, religion is a very personal matter in man and his life. Within the Eastern Philosophical traditions, we can find a great thinker and the religious man who was not limited to the East and the one who spread that new ideal of the religion to the Western world. He is Swami Vivekananda. He was born in 1863 and expired in 1902. Within that short period, he did excellent contribution to the tradition of the Vedantic religion.

To him, Religion is not just a talk and doctrines or theories, nor is it sectarianism Religion cannot live in sects and societies. It is a relationship between soul and God. He explains that religion does not consist in erecting temples or building churches or attending public worship. As well as it cannot find in the books or in words or in lectures or in organizations. Religion consists on realization. Religion does not consist in subscribing to a particular creed or faith but in spiritual realization. Therefore, spiritual realization is religion. He said "I shall try to bring before you the Hindu theory that religions do not come from without, but from within. It is my belief that religious thought is in man's very constitution, so much so that it is impossible for him to give up religion until he can give up his mind and body, until he can give up his thought and life."

Religion is inseparable with man and his life. Another thing is that, it is within the man. Each and every one should understand God within their soul through self-realization. Religion is the manifestation of the divinity already within man. Therefore, it is not necessary to have doctrines or dogmas and intellectual argumentation. It is realization in the heart of our hearts. It is touching God; it is feeling God and realizing that I am a spirit in relation with the universal spirit and all its great manifestations.

In a simple manner, his way of understanding of religion is that man must realize God, feel God, see God, and talk to God. That is the religion. To him material prosperity and wealth is not an important thing. However, the wealth of the spiritual thought is needed for the human progress.

All the religions of the world together constitute one whole. For him, there existed only one Eternal Religion of which all other religions were only variations. Each religion has a special bent, a unique trait, some good points and this uniqueness is not the different buildings, languages, rituals, books etc employed in various religions, but the internal soul of every religion. Every religion has a soul behind it, and that soul may differ from the soul of another religion. Thus, all these religions are different forces in the economy of God, working for the good of mankind. All the religions of the world together constitute one whole. All religions are valid means to the same end. It is not necessary to change the view point of one's own religion. To enrich one's life, one can accept some of the good points from another religion.

Man and his true nature is already divine. But that divinity is hidden. Therefore, the realization of that divinity should be the purpose of life; that is the religion. It is the harmony of the all religions, so that it is one of best solutions for the prevalent religious conflicts in the world. This research paper will analyze Swami Vivekananda's concept of universal religion and its implications on the prevalent religious conflicts in the world. In addition, the paper will try to investigate his views on the nature of postmodern world where we can say 'is there need for universal religion?'

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Introduction

Religion is deeply rooted in man and his blood since many centuries ago. Still it has been dominating man and his way of thinking and behavior. Within the framework of human rights, religion is considered as an inherent and individual right of the man. Religion has been a dominating factor in man and his ways of thinking and behavior. In many ways, religion has been a very intimate matter in man and his life. Within the contemporary world, various religious believers have to live physically close to one another because of the economic and social reasons. To create a peaceful co-existence within global society respect for religious diversity and acceptance of religious pluralism is essential. Within the Eastern Philosophical traditions, we can find a great thinker and the religious man who was not limited to the East and the one who spread that new ideal of the religion to the Western world. He is none other than Swami Vivekananda. He was born in 1863 and expired in 1902. Within the short span of life, he did excellent contribution to revive the tradition of the Vedantic religion.

Contemporary Indian philosopher Swami Vivekananda has discovered a unique explanation to the concept of religion. He argued for the necessity of a universal religion or acceptance of religious pluralism. According to him, religion is not just a talk on doctrines or theories, nor is it sectarianism i.e. Religion does not live in sects and societies. It is a relationship between soul and God. He explained that religion does not consist in erecting temples or building churches or attending public worship. Also it cannot be found in the books or in words or in lectures or in organizations rather religion consists of realization of binding finite self with the infinite [Brightman, 1940: 12]. Religion does not consist in subscribing to a particular creed or faith but in spiritual realization.

Therefore, spiritual realization is religion. He pointed out that the different people in the world approach spirituality in different ways. Furthermore, he asserted that man and his true nature is already divine. However, that divinity is hidden. Therefore, theses realization of that divinity is the purpose of life, which is the essence of religion. Therefore, religion is a very personal matter in man and his life. Therefore, religion is the essence of human life and it has the great motivating power in one's life including his social, economic and political aspect. We may call Vivekananda's formulation of this new ideal of universal religion as a universal love or universal brother-hood. It gives an equal value for all religions in the world as exemplifying truth. This research paper will analyze Swami Vivekananda's concept of universal religion and

its implications on the prevalent religious conflicts in the world. In addition, the paper will try to investigate his views on the nature of postmodern world where we can say 'is there need for universal religion?'

Vivekananda' Perspectives of Universal Religion: Personalities and Approaches

To give a clear definition to the concept of religious pluralism as discussed earlier it is a very difficult task. However, within the new philosophical debate some thinkers have tried to identify the concept of religious pluralism according to their experience and practices. There are many controversies about the concept of religious pluralism, because the term covers a wide variety of theological and philosophical discussions. The general perception of religious pluralism from a practical point of view, states that the different religious belief systems should work together. Some thinkers have argued that religious tolerance is another aspect of religious pluralism. This argument has been presented by some contemporary thinkers, and they have pointed out that religious pluralism sometimes is used as a synonym for interfaith dialogue. However, the central idea of religious pluralism is identified as different religious belief systems are true in their own way. Therefore, religious pluralism argues that claims to absolute truth are a hindrance to peace and harmony.

New age of information technology in the 21st century has reshaped the economy, culture, social stratification and social values in our lives today. We call this postmodern, post-industrial age as 'cyber society' or 'virtual society' in this society our economy; the way of professional life has changed. New advancements in communication system have transformed our globe into a global village. Our society has moved into the business of generating and manipulating symbols. The important thing is how it highlights the culture rather the culture itself has become a big business that are causing conflict and clashes in the modern world.

Religion is inseparable with man and his life. Another thing is that, it is within the man. Each and every one should understand God within their soul through self-realization. Religion is the manifestation of the divinity already within man. Therefore, it is not necessary to have doctrines or dogmas and intellectual argumentation. It is realization in the heart of our hearts. It is touching God; it is feeling God and realizing that I am a spirit in relation with the universal spirit and all its great manifestations.

In a simple manner, his way of understanding of religion is that man must realize God, feel God, see God, and talk to God. That is the religion. To him material prosperity and wealth is not an important thing. However, the wealth of the spiritual thought is needed to the human progress.

He understood the equal status of all the religions and the religious plurality in human society. However, he did not just jump into this conclusion. He questioned the truth and the religious plurality. Because if we say that one religion is true, automatically the rest of other religions become false. According to him, all religions are not really contradictory but supplementary to each other. According to him, "each religion, as it were, takes up one part of the great universal truth and spends its whole force in embodying and typifying that part of the great truth. It is, therefore, an addition and not exclusion" [Vivekananda, 1984: 28].

All the religions of the world together constitute one whole. For him, there existed only one Eternal Religion of which all other religions were only variations. Each religion has a special bent, a unique trait, some good points and this uniqueness is not the different buildings,

languages, rituals, books etc. employed in various religions, but — the internal soul of every religion. Every religion has a soul behind it, and that soul may differ from the soul of another religion [Vivekananda (Vol.II), 1989: 365]. He continues 'my idea, therefore, is that all these religions are different forces in the economy of God, working for the good of mankind' [Ibid.]. All the religions of the world together constitute one whole. All religions are valid means to the same end. It is not necessary to change ones religion. To enrich one's life, one can accept some of the good principles of other religions.

As human mind broadens, its spiritual steps broaden too. The time has already come when a man cannot record a thought without its reaching all corners of the earth; by merely physical means, we have come into touch with the whole world; so the future religions of the world have to become as universal and as wide. The religious ideals of the future must embrace all that exists in the world and is good and great, and at the same time, have infinite scope for future development [Ibid.: 67]. What becomes clear from these points of view is that the religion must be studied on a broader perspective than it was hitherto done. Therefore, in this aspect, I feel Vivekananda's view point of Religion is both a means as well as an end to human life.

He tries to prove that man and his true nature is already divine. However, that divinity is hidden. Therefore, the realization of that divinity should be the purpose of life and that is the religion. In his assessment of the need of universal religion, he emphasizes the importance of the humanity and universal brotherhood to keep religious harmony in society and there by he tried to eliminate the forces of hatred and destruction from the organizational religion and identified the true religion with universal love. He emphasized that the religion should be equally acceptable to all mind, it must be equally philosophical, equally emotional, equally mystic, and equally conductive to action.

It is possible to attain this religion with the help of 'Yoga' — 'Union'. For instance, to the worker it is the union between men and the whole of humanity, to the mystic between his lower and the higher self and the God of love and to the philosopher it is the union of all existence being and this is meant by yoga [Vivekananda S., 2015: 30]. He classifies the nature of man into four categories, namely, the active type, the mystic type, the philosophic type, and the devotional type. Four yogas were meant for these four types of human nature, and this gives strength to life. Vivekananda strongly asserts that the essence of all the religions is one. To realize this type of religion, man should have to practice four yogas. It is the yoga of knowledge or control of mind, or of selfless work or of love of God everything is possible and this is the realization of religion. Therefore, religion is the key essence of human life and it has the great motivating power. Accordingly, to him, religion is a value-oriented concept too.

His formation of new ideal on universal religion, we can call as universal love or universal brother-hood. It is given an equal value for all of religions of the world, as it is exist with truth. His identification of truth is not only with absolute truth but also scientific which can be practice by each and every body [Kenneth, 1989: 89]. To understand this it is not necessary to have deep literary knowledge, but requires practice. Therefore, I feel this concept can be applied to all nations, all societies and individuals irrespective of their religious beliefs. It is nothing but the harmony of the all religions, which can be one of best solutions for the prevalent religious conflicts in the world.

He narrates very nicely when he says, the poof of one religion depends on the proof of all the rest, if I have six fingers, and no one else has, you may say that it is abnormal. The same reasoning may be applied to the argument that only one religion is true and others are false. One religion only, like one set of six fingers in the world, would be unnatural. We see,

therefore, that if one religion true, all others must be true. This concept of religion is like 'Many lamps, but one light.' The Ultimate is One and the very perfection of existence, the ideal reality. He says, "If you go below the surface, you find that unity between man and man, between races and races, high and low, rich and poor, god and men, men and animals. If you go deep enough all will be seen as only variations of the One, and he who has attained to this conception of Oneness has no more delusion. What can delude him? He knows the reality of everything, the secret of everything. Where is there any more misery for him? He has traced the reality of everything to the Lord, the Centre, the Unity of everything, and that is Eternal Existence, Eternal Knowledge, and Eternal Bliss" [Vivekanada (Vol, ii), 1989: 153].

This expression of Universal Being is summed in the Vedanta philosophy by the celebrated aphorism, '*Tat Tvam Asi*', 'Thou art That' which means every soul exists in your body and in hurting anyone you hurt yourself; in loving anyone you love yourself. As soon as a current of hatred is thrown outside, whosoever else it hurts, it also hurts you. So spread love to bloom the garden of harmony and love [Vivekananda, 2015: 37]. It underlines the underline principle of Vedanta that man is divine and that all this, which we see around us, is outcome of that consciousness of divine. So each soul is potentially divine and the goal is to manifest this divinity within by controlling nature external and internal. This is the essence of religion.

The basic premise behind his conception of universal religion is the concept of universal equality of humankind. It provides the backbone to his philosophy of religion. It is an idea, which is very important and necessary for modern global era. Its relevance for the modern cosmopolitan and contemporary world is essential where importance is given to the material aspect of life, which should be fulfilled at any cost. As a result of it values like tolerance, compassion, love, and brotherhood are vanishing and conflict among races, caste, and religion is increased and to stop this and sow the seed of peace in the world I feel Vivekananda's philosophy of 'Universal Religion' is the only solace.

Conclusions

The concept of religious pluralism is the most critical and important debate within the current scenario in the world. This research paper is meant to understand Vivekananda's identification of the concept of universal religion and its application to the postmodern global world. Till now we have discussed the philosophical importance of the concept of universal religion. Now it has clear that during this century we have to implement this concept religion to modern world rather than discussing it again. Thus, we may conclude that we have only one solution for this multi- cultural and multi-religious world.

If we adhere to the concept of one universal religion as suggested by Vivekananda, which is not converting adherents of all other religions into one religion but accepting the religious pluralism which is the essence of Swami his vision of the world; where there is no hatred, no jealousy, no conflicts and no wars only everyone will be bind by the thread of love and progress of one will not be the hurdles to others. This universal ideal can be practiced not only by believers of different religions but equally by non-believers too, which will be founded on the ideal of oneness and humanity and it is geared for human self-realization which is not a monopoly of any particular religion; Where we can celebrate the religion of mystics and humanitarian's. This truly global vision can form the foundation for peaceful co-existence of all in the globe and we can bring the dream that 'entire world is one family.'

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