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Religion: In The Eyes of Swami Vivekananda

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Abstract

Religion is entrenched within human beings and in our society. Though we are in the 21st century, where science and technology transforming the entire world but the religion continues to hold vital importance in our everyday life in modern era also. Universal Religion of Swami Vivekananda has great socio-philosophic relevance in the modern world to build up world peace. In the present society, we have various kinds of religions and their several beliefs, rituals, philosophy and practices. Because of various opinions, people often have to deal with differences, conflicts, and violence based on existing religious issues. The most significant contribution of Swami Vivekananda to the modern world is 'Universal religion' which has an enlightened understanding of and respect for all the religions without losing the sense of unity, belonging to his own religion with its belief and practices. Swami Vivekananda has derived the concept of Universal Religion from Sankara's Advaita Philosophy. Swami Vivekananda says that religion does not consist in subscribing to a particular faith rather it is only our spiritual realization where there is no place for any kind of intolerance, hatred, conversion, bloodshed and the feelings of superiority in any particular religion. It is simply based on the expression of non-dualism which teaches us the feeling of unity and oneness.

Keywords: Universal Religion, belief, spiritual, Swami Vivekananda, Religion, Yoga

Methodology: In this paper, the researcher is using analytical research methods where the writings of Swami Vivekananda on universal religion have to be studied. For this purpose, the researcher has used secondary datas only to prepare this paper. The sources are collected from various books, journals available in the Internet.

Objectives: The main objective of this paper is to discuss about Vivekananda's concept of Universal Religion and find out the spiritual outlook of it. The paper is to propose a way which is free from religious conflicts by describing the utility of the idea of universal religion in the present world.

Implications: Vivekananda gives more importance to the practical teaching of Vedanta because he realizes that the application of teachings of Vedanta is suitable in modern era which could be a medium to understand the concept of universal religion. The philosophy

of religion is simple so that there is no difficulty to accept it even for the scientific man. It is rational, scientific and practical in nature. The truth of Vedanta is not capable of authentication for the saints and sages only but also for the ordinary men. The greatness of Vedanta lies in the fact that it is suitable for all mankind irrespective of their caste, class or religion. The door to salvation is equally open to all through the proper practice of yoga. In the Vedanta philosophy, the Hindu, the Muslim and the Christian are one; all are the children of the Almighty God. His teaching has the power to exceed the barriers of keenness and restrictedness into a communion of Universal Brotherhood. If Vivekanda's philosophy of religion can be properly understand and practice, it could serve as a source of inspiration for human progress.

Introduction:

Swami Vivekananda is a great Philosopher and spiritual leader of India who is a legendary figure of nineteenth century in the history of India. He is not just spiritual intellect; a creative thinker, great orator and passionate patriot. Swami Vivekananda's contribution in the domain of religion is endless. He revitalizes Hinduism and Vedanta as his religion. He believes in the philosophy of Advaita Vedanta's philosophy of religion in which the approach to the highest truth is psychological. He believes in the eternity. According to him, the different philosophies of Dualism, Qualified Monism and Monism represent the same truth from the different angles according to the temperament and capacity of their aspirants. There is no contradiction among them. Each religion expresses its own paradigm. The central theme of Vivekananda's philosophy of religion is the harmony among different religions.

Vivekananda holds that real religion is the realization of the Divinity which is present within every soul. It is the unity with divine power. This divinity is concealed within every individual and the religious practices of human beings bring it to our conscious level only. When human beings will start realizing one's Divinity as a direct experience, he or she will be free from any kind of fear not even death itself. Vivekananda holds that one must realize the divinity present within through his thought and selfless actions. Religion is not the matter of imagination only; it has practical aspect. We must apply religion in to our practical life and world.

Universal Religion:

Swami Vivekananda has advocated the concept of Universal Religion from the Vedanta Philosophy. He claims that Vedanta Philosophy has the potentiality to harmonize the diversity of Religion and also binds them in one thread of unity. He holds that a 'Universal Religion' must open its gates to every individual; it must admit that nobody is born with this or that particular Religion. It must be able to give satisfaction and comfort to every sect of religion. Universal Religion is not a new addition to the existing well-known Religions like Buddhism, Christianity, Islam or Hinduism. He gives more emphasis to concentrate the universally aspect of any religion so that bad effects of the religious conflicts can be avoided. It is the mark of universality. Hence, every religion is potentially a universal religion.

Swami Vivekananda holds that there are different kinds of religious sects which are essentially exists. The differences of opinion give us various ways and paths to achieve our spiritual goals in life. Universal religion will be religion of all religious people and not of one particular group on society. Thus, it will be the universally accepted religion. The central

idea in the life and teaching of Vivekananda is religious universalism where all religions are universal, equal and true.

Vivekananda believes that universal religion is really exists but we cannot realize its presence due to external conflicts of different religions. He describes that a simple insight into the natures of different religion will show the fact that religions are not actually contradictory to each other, infect they are in fact supplementary to each other. The truth of religion is so comprehensive that different religions concentrate only on one particular aspect or on a few aspects of religion only. So, the interpretation may be partial. Vivekananda wishes to make it clear that there may be contradictory points of view of the same things. If we take photograph of the same objects from different angles, no two photographs will be same. They make even give opposite impressions, but they are the photographs of same objects. It will make a difference between man and man, if we look an example from Jaina philosophy, reality has many sides. There are a story of six blind men and an elephant. The task is that each blind man has to describe how the elephant looks like. The blind person who touches the legs of the elephant describes it as 'pillar'. The man who touches the tail of the elephant describes it as 'Rope', again the man who touches the back side of the elephant describes it as 'wall' as so on. They describe the elephant from their own point of view which is correct but the reality is not partial, it is universal. This story explains the contradictory character of the different views. But they are basically views of the same reality and hence supplementary to each other. Hence, Universal Religion already exists in the Universal brotherhood of men.

Review of Related Literature:

The review of literature evolves from a basic understanding of the different variables studied by different researchers through studies related to Vedanta philosophy, concept of universal religion, Vivekananda's philosophy of non-dualism and so on. This review has been done to identify the research trends and gaps related to present topic. The study of Ratul Dutta in his article "*Universal Religion of Swami Vivekananda: A Vision of Unity and Brotherhood*" states that Vivekananda's idea of universal religion motivates us to see our oneness. There are no true distinctions among religions, it is only superficial. The teachings of Vivekananda's universal religion help us realize that we are all children of the same Father, and this understanding fosters unity and brotherhood among us. Again, another study of Partha Sarathi Das in his Article "*Swami Vivekananda's Concept of Universal Religion*" states about the teachings of Ramkrishna and its effect in the life of Swami Vivekananda. The Dr. Sk Nijamatulla in his writing "*Vivekananda's Universal Religion: from advaitic Idealism to ethical humanism*" beautifully discuss the theoretical foundations of Universalism, practical Vedanta and its implications. He said that Advaita Vedanta formed the philosophical foundation of Vivekananda's thought.

Discussion From All Perspectives:

Sri Ramkrishna's Impact on The Life of Vivekananda:

Sri Ramakrishna has a great role in the life of Vivekananda. He is the guru of Vivekananda. Vivekananda tries to follow the philosophy of Ramakrishna paramhansa. Sri Ramkrishna forwards into a new example. He has worked tireless towards betterment of the society. He has dedicated his life to serve the poor people and for the sake of his country. Like his Guru, Vivekananda also cherishes the world-view based on Advaita Vedanta philosophy. As a

Karma-Yogi, he does not stand for any abstract religion but for the religion of work with detachment Swami Vivekananda learns from the life and saying of Sri Ramakrishna that true religion is universal religion. He got support of his master's teachings from the 11th verse of the 7th

"ye yatha mann prapadyante tamstathaira bhajamyaham/mama vartma-nuvartante manushyah partha sarvashah"

(whoever comes to me, through whatever form, I reach him; all men are struggling through paths which in the end lead to me).[2]

In all his addresses and writings, Vivekananda aims at the establishment of universal Religion for the betterment of the entire universe, but Vivekananda made his surviving Statements on the idea of universal religion in his first address at Chicago Parliament of Religion on 11th September, 1893. Out of the many statements, we may remember only two in the following statements:

(a) "I am proud to belong to a religion which has taught the world both tolerance and Universal acceptance"

(b) "We believe not only in universal tolerance but we accept all religions to be true".[3]

Though Vivekananda is proud to belong to Hindu religion, he accepts all religions as true. This is his universalism of religions. The main essence of universal religion is acceptance of all. But acceptance is not just tolerance which is negative in its import implies that something is being allowed in spite of its being wrong. Vivekananda recommends only positive acceptance.

He holds that there have been many religions which are quarrelling among themselves by religion claiming that one religion is superior to other. In spite of the conflicts the major religions have managed to survive. The conflicts instead of weakening them have added vitality to them. The new thoughts arise only through that conflict. In dormant water there are no whirlpools. These are seen in a living running stream. In the same manner conflicts awaken new thoughts.[4]

Philosophy of Harmony in Universal Religion:

Harmony is the keynote of Vivekananda's religious teachings. He holds that harmony means unity and not uniformity. Harmony cannot be obtained by a combination of different views about God. We cannot make all conform to the same ideas. If we all thought in the same way we would be like Egyptian mummies in a museum looking vacantly at one another's faces. When religions are dead, there will be no more sects; it will be the perfect peace and harmony among men and men and between men and God. But in reality, sects and variation of thought is the sign of life which must be there. So, one of the natural characteristics of the universal religion is based on universal toleration. The universal sympathy humanizes one sect of religious activity with the other in spite of different kinds of their internal and external conflicts. There are two sects in Universal religion, Internal and external. External sect becomes more and more prominent which Individuals can understand as their religion like Buddhism, Jainism, Islamism, Christianism, Hinduism etc. But the internal sect is the only realization of divinity, sacrifice for all.

Non-Dualism in Universal Religion:

The main aim of Universal Religion is to teach us the knowledge of the divinity of the soul, the non-duality of God, the unity of existence and the most vital thing that is the harmony of all different religions. Though the paths of different religions are different from one another, in spite of that "All religions are true". The important thing is to reach to reach the goal. For example, if an individual wants to reach in the rooftop of a building, there may be various ways of reaching there. One can reach it by stone stairs, one can reach it by wooden stairs, one can reach it by bamboo steps, one can reach it by a rope, and one can also climb up by a bamboo pole. Similarly, there may be various paths to realize the existence of God, it depends upon one's sincerity and earnestness of faith on God. It is God alone who is called 'Satchidananda Brahma' in the Vedas, 'Satchidananda Krishna' in the Puranas, and 'Satchidananda Shiva' in the Tantras. It is one and the same Satchidananda. Being an Advaitavadin, Vivekananda's philosophy of Universal Religion teaches us to love God and realize the Ever-living God by feeling that "All are one" which is non-dual in nature.

According to Swami Vivekananda, religion is equally acceptable to all minds. It must be equally emotional, equally mystic, equally philosophic and equally conducive to action.

Importance of Yoga in Universal Religion:

The religion is attained by Yoga or Union with God. 'Yoga' means 'Yoke' to join, i.e. to join the soul of man with the supreme soul or God. Vivekananda wants to development the all four Yogas. The ultimate goal of its Yoga is the realization of the supreme self. He observes that human psychology can realize divinity through four complementary paths of yoga irrespective of their religion, culture, caste, language etc. **Karma-Yoga** is the vital step which is the path of unselfish action, duty that can purify our soul. **Bhakti-Yoga** is the path of devotion and universal love which can control human emotions. **Raja-Yoga** is the path of psychological, physical and mental control through patanjali's eight steps of yoga that can treat human mind as the instrument of scientific enquiry. **Jnana-Yoga** is the path of wisdom, spiritual discrimination through which one can realize the ultimate unity of the Absolute. The main aim of universal religion is to teach us the knowledge of divinity of the soul, the non-duality, the unity of existence, sacrifice, kindness, tolerance and acceptability which is the universality of different religions.

Findings of the Study:

It may say that Vivekananda observes several key features of religion. One significant feature is that it has a link to a supernatural reality which sets religion apart from other intellectual pursuits and can form the basis of religious life. Vivekananda explains that religion aims to go beyond the limits of human external senses and rational thought. The major aspect of religion is its value not just for personal development but also for the entire society. Hence, Vivekananda believes that religion is the foundation of morality. Without this foundation, ethics cannot possible. When we emphasize that doing good or right is important, people often ask why we should act morally? This question can only be addressed through universal concepts. Vivekananda argues that religion provides this universal ideal which grants ethics, its meaning, justification, and stability. Vivekananda believes that religion plays a crucial role in human life. He regards it as the highest and healthiest activity of the human mind because it motivates people to go beyond our sensory limitations and strive for the infinite. This is the spiritual quest which provides inner satisfaction, helps individuals rise above life's ordinary troubles, and allows them to find

peace and happiness. Hence, religion stands as the strongest force which inspires and guides the human mind towards progress.

Conclusion:

Universal religion is the notion for all kinds of religious dissension. It binds the religious diversity into one golden thread of unity. The concept of universal religion is relevance to the modern global world. This global vision of Vivekananda can form the foundation for peaceful co-existence of all in the world. In this world, there is no place for any kind of intolerance, hatred, conversion, persecution, bloodshed etc. In fact, it is based on the expression of non-dualism which teaches us the feeling of oneness. Universal religion has an ideal approach that accepts all the diverse opinions, beliefs, cultures and respects the diversity in order to bring peace, promote brotherhood and harmony for the better functioning of human life and society. This concept of religion is like "Many Lamps, but one light". It means one should not make any distinction between their caste, class or religion. It is the matter of spiritual realization and attainment. It is rational and intellectual. If every individual would start to realize their internal sect- accept the beauty and values of all religions without disrespecting others, the conflicts in the name of religion would be vanished. Through sacrifice and tolerance, feeling of oneness and universal brotherhood can be achieved. Infact, Swami Vivekananda's philosophy of universal religion can be a touch stone to make a peaceful world in which there will be no space for casteism, racism, and religionism. It is only the power of Universal religion by the realization of which individuals will be free to live their life peacefully without external conflicts. Rabindranath Tagore says that if anyone wants to know India, one must understand Vivekananda. It is only through Vivekananda's philosophy, may be one day, we can reach at the top of the world.

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