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Abstract

One of the Swami Vivekananda's greatest contributions to mankind is 'Universal religion' – a new religious ideology. It is not a new religion with a new scripture, but it is a new approach to religion, a new spiritual temper. It not only enjoins tolerance, it urges acceptance of other religions as true thereby making religions a principle of human unity. Universal religion is a discovery of universality in all religions excluding the particularities of creed, dogma beliefs, rituals and convention of them (religions). A believer in universal religion has an enlightened understanding of and respect for all the religions without losing the sense of belonging to his own religion with its belief and practices. In his Chicago Addresses in 1893 Swami Vivekananda gave importance on the validity and universality of all religions. He mentioned that every religion is able to create purity, sacredness and kindness in human mind. So, he accepted the validity of all religions. He appealed to all that everyman must keep up his oneness in the sphere of religion and accept all that is good in other religions. To him, a religion which is capable of giving satisfaction and comfort to every religious sect can be granted as universal religion.

Keywords: Universal Religion, religious ideology, Hinduism, Vedanta

Introduction:

The religious concepts of Vivekananda are very much broad in attitude. He says that religion is not talk or doctrines or theories. It is not sectarianism, i.e., it cannot live in sects and societies. Religion is the relation between the soul and God. It doesn't consist in erecting temples or building churches or attending public worship. Religion is not to be detected in books or in words or in lectures or in organizations. It is realization. The intention of Vivekananda is that religion cannot be accepted as signifying a particular creed or faith but in a state of spiritual realization. All religions should cultivate the divinity within to the perpetual level. It is neither blind faith nor mere intellectual understanding, but being and becoming are more significant regarding spiritual life. Each and every religion of the world should understand that this building of life and character and spiritual transformation is the essence of religion. We can notice in the philosophy of Vivekananda that spirituality gets prime importance through which he doesn't denote the changing manners and customs but the idea of oneness of all. He wanted to make man understand that the more the religions of the world rise to spiritual realization the more conflicting or quarrelling forms and clear cut variations are bound to disappear. Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, in this regard, says that all paths of ascent lead to the top of the hill. Whatever approach we take is immaterial. Like all birds fly in the air all the fishes swim in water without any trace behind, the seeker of the spirit also traverses the pathway.

According to Swamiji, real religion is the realization of the Divine within by every soul. This divinity is latent within each one of us and the religious practices only bring it to our conscious level. When one has realized one's Divinity as a direct experience one has no fear of anything not even death itself. He must realize this divinity in his thought and selfless actions. Religion is not the matter of imagination; we must apply religion to our practical world and life1.

The great master, Sri Ramakrishna taught men to transcend the barriers of his own little self and to live for enlivening the life of others, knowing that all are but that one in many forms. The religious orientation and realization of Sri Ramakrishna found its finest expression in the life of Swami Vivekananda.

Like his master, Vivekananda also cherished the world-view based on Advaita Vedanta view of unity-in difference. As a Karma-Yogi, he did not stand for any abstract religion but for the religion of work with detachment or work for impersonal ends as the highest expression of the religious life.

Swami Vivekananda learnt 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 chapter of the Bhagavad-Gita "ye yatha mann prapadyante tamstathaira bhajamyaham/mama vartma-nuvartante manushyah partha sarvashah" (who ever 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 aimed at the establishment of universal religion for the betterment of the universe as a whole. 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 of the many statements we may remember only two for the present purpose:

(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 he was proud to belong to Hindu religion, he accepted all religions as true. This is his universalism of religions. So we see his address on Hinduism on 19th September 1893 at the same place he presented his idea of Universal religion. The one watch word for universal religion is acceptance. Acceptance is not just tolerance. Tolerance is negative in its import. It implies that something is being allowed in spite of its being wrong. Swamiji recommends positive acceptance.

Swamiji said, there have been many religions. They have been quarrelling among themselves, each religion claiming that it is superior. 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 a stagnant water there are no whirlpools. These are seen in a living running stream. In the same manner conflicts awaken new thoughts.4

'Universal Religion' as suggested by Swami Vivekananda, is not a new addition to the existing list of known religions like Buddhism, Christianity, Confucianism, Hebraism, Hinduism, Islam, Laninism, Sikhism, Taoism and Zoroastrianism. It is neither a separate religion nor an alternative caption suggested for any particular religion. Normally one may expect that as a Hindu and religious preacher he has glorified his own religion by claiming it to be a universal religion. But it is clear that while talking about universal religion Swamiji's intention has not been concentrated in glorifying his own religion, rather the emphasis seems to have been concentrated the universality aspect of any religion so that bad effects of the religiosities can be avoided.

As we have learnt that universal religion is not a new religion, it is important to make it more specific, what is meant by universal religion. Here it can be pointed out that something can be treated to be universal when it keeps its gate open to every individual one might born from parents of a particular religion but he must have the choice to adopt any one. The choice of the individual is of prime importance. It is the mark of universality. Further a religion if capable of giving satisfaction and comfort to every religious sect can be treated to be universal. The religion should appear reasonable to the people of other religious sects in order to be universal. When we shall throw away the narrow out-looks, non-humanitarian considerations from the religions, they all will become universal by nature. So, every religion is potentially a universal religion.

The great religious masters of the world teach that not the external forms but the power that is latent within mankind can bring salvation to light. Man lives and takes movement in God. Creeds and sects play their parts for children, their lasting is purely temporary. Books never make religions, rather religions make books. The end of all religions is the realization of God in the soul. That is the one universal religion. The one universal truth in all religions, according to Vivekananda, thus, is realizing God within.

He asserts that ideals and methods may differ, but that's the central point. When someone puts that he is right or his church or temple or mosque or gurudwara is right and all others are wrong, he unfortunately misses that upon the roof of all the others depend the proof of his own.

Naturally, a relevant question may immediately arise –what do we mean by the ideal of a universal religion? In this respect, Vivekananda comments: 'I do not mean any one universal philosophy, or any universal mythology, or any one universal ritual, held alike by all; for I know that this world must go on working wheel within wheel, this intricate mass of machinery, most complex, most wonderful".

In modern age, the very essence of universal religion has been highlighted by Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Keshab Chandra Sen., Sri Ramakrishna Paramhansa, Vivekananda, Rabindranath Tagore, Vethathri Maharishi, Romain Rolland etc. Universal religion does not seem a mere dead conformity or dry dogma as constituted by vain intellect or only product of liberal thought. This concept recognizes and pays significance to the emotional and aesthetic resources of man to divert or sublimate them towards the Para or the Highest

Vivekananda explained that the language of the soul is one, the languages of the nations are many; their customs and methods of lives are totally different. Religion is of the soul that gets revealed through various nations, languages and customs. So, the difference among the world religions is one of expressions and not of substances, and their points of similarity are intrinsic. Vivekananda puts that the so-called doctrines or dogmas, rituals or books, temples or churches are but "secondary details". Vivekananda represented Hinduism not as a specific belief found on Puranic idolatry anand mythology. As a proud Hindu, he described that Hinduism is a Universal Religion which depends on spiritual truth to be achieved in own life. He puts that the spiritual realization is the absolute testing of truth than any authority got from the past. This realization is of oneness

The philosophy of the Advaita Vedanta was realized by Vivekananda as the last term in respect of religious ways and this deep realization and conviction made him to synthesize and harmonize all sorts of sects under the banner of Vedanta. Vivekananda was very much aspirant regarding the future religion to be free from all racial prejudices or sectarian biasness that should be sustained through the spirit of a democratic unified awareness, made realistic and concrete through the highest spiritual ideals.

Vivekananda accepts Vedanta's true metaphysics and universality. The objectivity of all religious quests is fulfilled by the Vedanta. The great idea of Vedanta is nothing but the idea of the oneness of all, of the infinite and the impersonal, the wonderful idea of the eternal soul of mankind, of the ceaseless continuity in the march of objects, of the infinity of the universe. Vedanta consists of eternal principles without depending upon the authority of persons. It alone can be treated as universal religion as it teaches principles. No religion based on a person can be accepted as a type of universal religion by all the races of mankind. The Vedanta approves the eternal nature of man. Reality is one and eternal but it exists in many forms – "Ekam sat Vipra Vahuda Vadanti". The central principle of the universe can be treated as unity in Diversity.

In the parliament of religions at Chicago on 11th Sept, 1893, Vivekananda presented before that assembly that the different religions of the world like Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, different sects of Christianity, Islam etc. were not religions dividing the whole world into disputing sects, but these religions formed a grand federation of kindred faiths owing allegiance to some spirit, i.e., universal. The universalism of Vivekananda maybe said to be essentially a creative religious tolerance that broadens that liberal principle into a spiritual ideal and accepts all religions as but different revelations of man's approach to Truth and God

Towards the end of the memorable and historic third address at the Parliament on 19th Sept, 1893, Vivekananda, emphasizing on universal religion, said: 'if there is ever to be a universal religion it must be one which will have no location in place or time; which will be infinite like the God it will preach, and whose sun will shine upon the followers of Krishna and of Christ, on saints and sinners alike, which will

not be Brahmanic or Buddhistic, Christian or Mohammedan, but the sum total of all these, and still have infinite space for development;

Universal religion as conceived by Vivekananda is, therefore, not a new religion with a new scripture and a new liturgy, it can be treated as a fresh approach to religion, a fresh spiritual and moral outlook. It prescribes not only tolerance; it insists on acceptance of other religions too as true and making religion thereby a principle of human unity. Universal religion may, thus, be said to be a discovery of universality in all religion. 7 Thus, a believer in universal religion possesses a good understanding of and reverence for world religion without losing his sense of belonging to his own religion. For him, ‘unity in variety is the plan of the universe’

Swamiji, wants to establish a religion that will be equally acceptable to all minds. It must be equally philosophic, equally emotional, equally mystic and equally conducive to action. This combination will be the ideal of the nearest approach to a universal religion to become harmoniously balanced in all these four directions in his ideal of religion. And this religion is attained by Yoga or union with God. ‘Yoga’ means “Yoke” to join, that is, to join the soul of man with the supreme soul or God. Swamiji wanted a total development of all the four Yogas. Hence he advocated a combination of all the four Yogas. To the worker it is union between the men and the whole of unity. To the mystic, it is union between his lover and higher self. To the lover, it is union between himself and the God of love. To the philosopher, it is the union of all existence.

The ultimate goal of each Yoga is the same that is realization of the supreme self. Each of four Yogas represents the development of one particular mental faculty that is reason, emotion or will. The spiritual practices prescribed by these Yogas build up character.

Universal religion is a discovery of universality in all religion. Swamiji thinks of the possibility of bringing together all religions of the world under one umbrella. The dream of Vivekananda was to propagate a universal religion based on the spiritual synthesis. The aim of the universal religion of Swami Vivekananda is to glorify the universe with peace and harmony by overcoming the apparent contradictions and fictitious differences among the different religious faiths.

The main aim of Universal Religion is just to teach us the knowledge of the divinity of the soul the non-duality of God-head, the unity of existence and one greater thing, that is, universality or harmony of all different religions. “All religions are true”. The important thing is to reach to roof. 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. One can also climb up by a bamboo pole. 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. One can realize it after a long period of earnest quest. Where it comes, it shakes the very foundation of the personality of the seeker. It is like a huge elephant entering a small hut. The house shakes to its foundation. Perhaps it falls to pieces. It is the question of state of realization. The state of Brahman – realization is not Philosophy. It is a matter of spiritual attainment.

Conclusion:

From the above discussion, it follows that Vivekananda’s ideal of universal religion is a step towards universal humanity. According to his thoughts, the concept of universal fraternity has frequently been claimed as the central message of the great religions of the world which is to be attained. Vivekananda is an Advaitavadin. His philosophy of Universal Religion teaches us that to love God and realized the Ever-living God and feel that “All are one” is the true spiritual mark of understanding religion. It regulates the human life. If there is no inner life there is no religion either. Religion is a matter of the inner life. Religion intervenes human conduct. It regulates the human life. If there is no inner life there is no religion either. Religion is a matter of the inner life. Religion intervenes human conduct

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