

Jharna Bhattacharyya
Scottish Church College

Swami Vivekananda's Ideal of Universal Religion

Swami Vivekananda, a legend of 19th century India, is an institution by himself. The profound knowledge which he gained from his master Sri Ramakrishna, latter on transformed him into a world-master. His teachings and preaching showed the real path of Universal Religion and personal spiritual upliftment. He advocates the message of rendering unflinching love and service to the mankind. He preached the lesson of universal brotherhood which is the essence of all religion. Swami Vivekananda felt that religion is a necessary aspect of human life. He said, "Of all forces that have worked and are still working to mould the destiny of human race, none certainly is more potent than that, the manifestation of which we call Religion." (*Jnana Yoga*, 1). Vivekananda said that food, clothing, shelter etc. can only satisfy our out-word needs of life. But even in the midst of all comfort and luxury man craves for something higher, something better. This is nothing but the man's craving for religious upliftment which alone can give him real peace and solidarity. But as there are various religious organizations conflicts are there and everybody thinks that his or her opinion is the only perfect and acceptable view of religion which is to be followed on. So Swamiji tried to establish the inner truth of every religion and showed that though there are conflicts among different religious schools regarding the religious opinion of their own the inner spirituality is the same. Therefore if a man wants peace sincerely he must believe upon a Universal religion which will combine every religion and every man in this world simultaneously. Swamiji said, "The message that are coming down to us from the prophets and holy men and women of all sects and nations are joining their forces and speaking to us with the trumpet voice of the

past. And the first message it brings us is: Peace be unto you and to all religions. It is not a message of antagonism, but of one united religion.” (*Complete Works Vol-1*, 317).

Swamiji said that religion is a question of fact not of talk. Religion is actually realization what Swamiji wanted to establish. Divinity is our birth right and religion is nothing but to manifest this inner divinity, Swamiji expressed. Now some may argue that if this is the ultimate goal of religion as such, then why there are so many differences among various religions and how to make sure that this is but nothing is the actual truth behind all religious beliefs? If we accept the opinion of a certain religion as true and simultaneously deny the truth claim of other religions we practically deny the authenticity of those pious and sincere adherents of those religion. Because it was their claim and this denial will give rise to serious social problem.

We may argue that the conflicting religious claims has no actual or real basis. These are nothing but a certain attitude towards life and behaviour. We are making a hypothesis or a presupposition at first then we are setting a goal of life and then we are acting in such a way that as if the way and behaviour of ours are the only reasonable activities which are conducive to freedom, the freedom of soul, the final resting state, the ultimate and eternal requirement of human life. This is a typical religious belief and nothing else. So there is no question of truth falsity. Now we may conclude positively that our so called religion has only a subjective basis, some subjective dispositions are there which a certain person is recommending and is expecting his or her followers to follow some activities, which are so called religious activities, recommended by him or her, blindly.

Some may argue like non- cognitivists that religion is a new interpretation or a new point of view which tries to interpret the existing religious belief, explaining some new appealing area and make people believe that this is or that is the main tenants of that

particular religion and for all these days they were dealing with some useless propaganda. Now, here, this typical new religious explanation would be very much popular if and only if the person concerned is clever enough to understand the people in general thoroughly and can make use of their common psychology. At the same time he or she must be a good orator and if this is so then his or her narration would gather a lot of followers unquestionably. These types of consequences occurred in the development of the history of religion repeatedly. So here also we may say reasonably that no factual truth claim is there in so called popular religious beliefs. Because these are not actually the sincere representation of the reality as such. These are guided by hidden personal interests, undoubtedly.

But Swamiji never said so. He said that religion is of course a 'matter of fact'. In his own words, "we have to analyse our own souls and find what is there. We have to understand it and realise what is understood. This is religion. No amount of talk will make religion." (Chetanananda 85). Swamiji believed that God is the common factor of all religion and He is in our own heart. Our intellect, reason and arguments have nothing to do in this matter. Only direct perception and realization of one's own, will pursue the goal. Swamiji said, "Give up what is evil and give up what is good. What remains then? Behind good and evil stands something which is yours, the real you, beyond every evil, and beyond every good too, and it is that which is manifesting itself as good and bad." (*Complete Works* Vol-2, 181). According to Swami Vivekananda this is real 'I', the self, the real manifestation of God and knowing myself is according to him is knowing God. This is religion and nothing else.

Swamiji argued that the differences of religious opinion are necessary for the progress and growth of thought and also for religious discussions. Because this differentiations and contradictions give rise to further thoughts and in this way religion makes its way to its desired destination. Otherwise, it will lose its flow and become stagnant and "there is no whirlpools in stagnant dead water." (Chetanananda 85). Swamiji prayed for this

variation because variation is the sign of life, the sign of existence. Swamiji was of this opinion that the sects must exist so that they may go on multiplying more and more the religious contradictions. It is clear from this that Swamiji tried to give emphasis on individual religious opinion and at the same time was asking for realisation of the common root which is indistinguishable in every religion and to make religion universal. Swamiji was sure about the fact that though there are apparent contradictions among different religions they must realize one day or other that reality cannot be many in number. Reality is one and eternal, it is all pervading. So the one is the real, and that is the Infinity. There is no contradiction in the bottom level. The truth which everyone wants to achieve is non-changing non-dual eternity. No controversy, no question of misbelief is there. The only problem is that we are not yet aware of this fact.

Swamiji said that in course of time different religions taught us different ideologies. They are surely different from each other's opinion. Sometimes they are also contradictory. But contradiction cannot change the reality. Contradiction is apparent and external. The unchanging and never-ending reality stay as it is, for time eternal. Swamiji said that different religions have gave us different ideology and therefore it is not very easy to find a common element which is present in all of them. He said, "Islam for example, lays emphasis on universal brotherhood, Hinduism on spirituality, Christianity on self-purification for entering into the kingdom of God. It is difficult to compare these and, therefore, the tenants of universal religion would not be the common character of different religions". (Lal 45). Though Swamiji was saying that it is difficult to organise them in a same ideology, even then he believed that there is a religion which is universal by nature and it is possible to make this world understand the universal appeal of that world religion. Swamiji said, "Through the vistas of the past the voice of the centuries is coming down to us; the voice of the sages of the Himalayas and the recluses of the forest; the voice that came to the Semitic races; the voice

that spoke through Buddha and other spiritual giants; the voice that comes those who live in the light that accompanied man in the beginning of the earth-the light that shines wherever man goes and lives with him for ever-is coming to us even now"

Swamiji in this point started to explain the fact that contradiction is not a proof for admitting the fact that the object regarding which certain contradictions had arisen is practically a fact which is actually a subject to contradiction, and it is by nature such a complicated and ambiguous element that never these complications can be solved. Swamiji said, "If we take photograph of the same object from different angles, no two photographs will be alike- they may even give opposite impressions; but they are photographs of the same object." (Lal 44). Swamiji said truth is Infinity, it is the light. It is the spirit. The unchanging being in the realm of ever-changing empirical reality. Swamiji uttered the words of Gita, "The reality in nature is spirit. Reality itself-the light of the spirit-moves and speaks and does everything [through our bodies, etc.]. It is the energy and soul and life of the spirit that is being worked upon in different ways by matter". (*Complete Works* Vol-1, 471).

Swamiji observed that there are four types of men in this world. Some people are there who prefer to work and their aim is to feel God through their hard work and sacrifice. Some other persons are lover. They love God and always think of His kindness and mercy. These people can sacrifice everything for their Loving One and tears come to their eyes when they even think of Him and His grace. Some are there who are mystical by nature and want to feel mystical union with God through exercising control over the working of mind. There are also philosophers who are always trying to establish the actual reality through reason. Swamiji said a religion which is universal by nature must satisfy all these three types of people, because all of them are earnestly seeking the truth and the transcendental realization of the impersonal ground of that Ultimate Reality is their supreme end. Behind every activity there lies the same thirst, the same cry, the same craving. Swamiji told "And this union is

attained by what we, in India, call Yoga-union.” (*Complete Works Vol - 3*, 419). Swamiji said that for workers this is the union between men and the whole of humanity, for mystics this is the union between his lower and higher self, for the lover this union is between himself and his God of Love, for the philosophers this is the union of all existence. Vivekananda said, “It is the whole soul becoming changed into what it believes.” (*Complete Works Vol - 3*, 432).

Swamiji told to the whole world that the concept of universal religion as explained in Vedanta philosophy can give us that universal approach of religion. He said though we, the Indians, have thousands of Gods and Goddesses, they are only the appearances of that supreme Lord. We are solely the worshippers of one Infinite God who expresses and manifests Himself in multiple ways. The Hindus know that the images are not God. But these images help them to keep their mind fixed on their object of meditation. Vedanta teaches us that all the rituals, prayers, sacrifices and everything which we generally call religion are only the external part of religion, and realization is the only way which leads to God, our destiny. “External worship, material worship”, say the Hindu scriptures, “is the lowest stage; struggling to the high, mental prayer, is the next stage; but the highest stage is when the Lord has been realized.” (*Bhagavad Gita*, 10.41.) Swamiji said that the Hindu scriptures depict that man is travelling from truth to truth, from lower truth to the higher truth. But never from error to truth. Vivekananda believed that every religion is progressing from the lowest form to the highest form and in every stage of their progress they are trying to grasp the ultimate truth. At every moment they are going nearer to their glorious end. So we are wrong when we consider a certain religious belief as true and another as false. We have no right to do this because it is reality that every religion is explaining that Infinity in their own way. Here Swamiji advocates the universal message of Vedanta Philosophy, the philosophy of Universal acceptance. “The one watch-word for Universal Religion, according to Vivekananda, is acceptance. Acceptance is not just tolerance. Tolerance is negative in its import...”

(*Contemporary Indian Philosophy* 45.). Vedanta teaches us to accept everyone. Tolerance means we are kind enough to tolerate your wrong and false opinion but acceptance is something more generous. Here there remain no difference between the opinion of mine and others. It is possible only when we realise that there is actually no difference between us. We are sharing the same truth. Our means may differ but the ultimate end is the same, the God, the Supreme Lord. Sri Ramakrishna said, “yata mat tato path” which means there are enumerable ways to reach our destination and every way is leads to the Lord. Swamiji uttered, “Thus my religion means expansion, and expansion means realisation and perception in the highest sense-no mumbling words or genuflections. Man is to become divine, realising the divine more and more from day to day in an endless progress. (*Complete Works* Vol - 1, 332).

Swamiji realized that the Universal Religion can give shelter to every individual, it is able to give satisfaction and comfort to every religious sects and it has the power to super shade the conflicts of different sects. Vivekananda declared that such a religion is already there and it is none but the Hindu religion.it is broad- minded and open- hearted. In the parliament of religion while speaking about Hinduism Swamiji described its spiritual nature and said that to know God and to become God is its whole object. He said, “The Hindus does not want to live upon words and theories. If there is existence beyond the ordinary sensuous existence, he wants to come face to face with them” (*Complete Works* Vol - 1, 13). He further claimed, “The Hindu religion does not consist in struggles and attempts to believe a certain doctrine or dogma, but in realising-not in believing, but in being and becoming.” (*Complete Works* Vol - 1, 13). Swamiji said that unity in diversity is the plan of nature and the Hindu only recognised it.

Swamiji wanted a bright sun of intellectuality joined with the heart of Buddha, the wonderful, infinite heart of love and mercy. He believed that this union will give us the

highest philosophy. According to him if this happens the science and religion will meet and shake hands. Poetry and philosophy will become friends and that will be the religion of the future. He said if we can work it out, we may be sure that it will be for all times and peoples. Swami Vivekananda said, “A tremendous stream is flowing towards the ocean carrying us all along with it; and though like straws and scraps of paper we may at times float aimlessly about, in the long run we are sure to join the Ocean of Life and Bliss.”(*Complete Works Vol - 2, 188.*)

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