

**MEANS TO RESOLVE RELIGIOUS CONFLICT: IN THE LIGHT OF
SWAMI VIVEKANANDA**

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Man is said as a superior creation of God. Chandidas in this context beautifully says, “Sabār upore mānuṣ satya, tāhār upore nāi”, i.e., man is superior to all and nothing exists over and above humanity. Shakespeare expresses his deep wonder and says, “Oh, what a piece of work is man!” The Purāṇa also says that generally after visiting the circle of 84 million different births we born as a human being for the second time. John Stuart Mill says that it is better to be a Socrates dissatisfied than to be a pig satisfied”. So, the above view clearly implies that human beings are superior to animals like cow and dog. But why is the human being claimed as superior? What is the ground of his superiority? One of the best answers to this question is - it is due to *Dharma* in the sense of morality that human being is different from and superior to animal. Keeping this view it is clearly stated in our *Śāstra*, “*Dharmena hīnāḥ paśubhiḥ samānāḥ*”. Max Muller rightly points out “The true history of man is the history of religion”. Swami Vivekananda also agrees with this view. According to him, religion is as necessary as food, clothing and shelter. So, it is not the luxury of our life. “Satisfaction over the material needs cannot make a man happy, he craves for something more. It is nothing but his spiritual or religious hunger.”¹ Christianity, in this regard, also says, “Man cannot live by bread alone”. Swamiji says, “...of all the forces that have worked and are still working to mould the destiny of human race, none certainly is more potent than that, manifestation of which we call religion.”² Religion ensures a lot of well-beings for our society. For example, a number of man make their spiritual progress and thereby attain their Ultimate Goal i.e. *mokṣa*. A religious and moral code ensures the peace, progress and happiness in the society. A cementing relationship is made among different members belonging to one religion. So far as the well-beings brought about by religion in our society is concerned it reminds us the definitions of religion given by Mīmāṃsā School and *Mahābhārata*. Definition given by the Mīmāṃsakas is as follows: ‘*Codanālokaṣaṇo’rthaḥ dharmah’* i.e., the Vedic injunctions connected with our wellbeing and imparting inspiration is *dharma*. According to the *Mahābhārata*, to think about the wellbeing of all human beings is *dharma* (*manasā śivamācaret*). But the adverse effect caused by religion upon our society in no way is less. The religion

which is blessing to human beings sometime turns into curse when one religion is in conflict with another religion. Owing to this religious conflict and violence numberless people become homeless, destitute and even they lose their near and dear ones.

So, the questions may be raised: what is the cause of this religious conflict? How can these conflicts be resolved? If a doctor is to treat a patient then first of all he has to detect the actual cause or causes of the disease and subsequently he has to prescribe proper medicines. Doctors may be of various types. Some doctors are meant for human beings, some are for animals, some are for trees and plants, and some again are for society. Philosophers and religious thinkers like Swami Vivekananda and Ramkrishna are famous doctors meant for our society. Society like us also suffers from many diseases and becomes sick and weak. Religious conflict is one of the dangerous diseases of our society. So, as a doctor of society Vivekananda is to detect the actual cause of this disease and accordingly prescribes proper medicine. I think, he has done exactly the same. I think it is important to note what is said by Rabindranath Tagore to Romain Rolland. Rabindranath says to him, "If you want to know India, read Vivekananda" and Romain Rolland after reading some of the works of Vivekananda says, "going through the pages of writings of Vivekananda at this distance of thirty years, I feel an electric shock within my nerves". Swamiji says that religious conflict arises only because we fail to understand what religion actually is. And again we fail to understand the actual nature or essence of religion due to our dogmatic and self-centred attitude. This dogmatic outlook leads to close the door of our rationality. We become rationally blind and see the whole religion only through the eyes of blind faith from where the problem crops up. At this stage one becomes so bias that he considers that only his religion is true and all other's religions are false.

Vivekananda says, "We must learn that truth may be expressed in a hundred ways and that each of these ways is true as far as it goes."⁴ So one and the same thing may be viewed from hundreds of different stand points. One view appears to be contradictory to the other views if they are judged ignoring the different stand points from which they are made. But, the moment the different standpoints are taken into account contradiction resolves. An example may be taken. Suppose one asks about the location of India. One says that India is to the east and another says that it is to the

west. The person concerned gets confused listening to two contradictory statements. But, the moment he takes into account the two different standpoints from where the statements have been made, the confusion dissolves. It may happen that the first person makes the statement from Pakistan and the second person makes the statement from Bangladesh. Likewise, confusion and conflict arise in the field of religion when we come across different contradictory religious views and we try to understand them ignoring the different standpoints from which they are made. It may happen that one view has been offered by the persons believing that God exists in temple, another view may be given by those believing the same in Mosque and again the third view may be forwarded by those believing God as existing in Church. We have to keep in our mind that the three different religious institutions stand for three different socio-cultural set ups. So, the moment we judge the different views from the different socio-cultural set ups, conflict resolves.

Vivekananda has been greatly influenced by his master Ramkrishna. Keeping the spirit of the view of Ramkrishna '*Jata mat tata path*' Swamiji introduces the concept of Universal Religion in the light of which he tries to resolve the religious conflicts. He says. "Mankind ought to be taught that religions are but varied expressions of THE RELIGION, which is oneness, so that each may choose the path that suits him best." Ramkrishna through his teaching '*jata mat tata path*' wants to mean that different religions are nothing but the different paths towards the realization of God, the Ultimate Reality. We can reach our destination following different routes by different vehicles. For example, we can reach Kolkata by bus-route. We can reach there by rail; or we can reach the same place by flight. Likewise, we can reach to God or *mokṣa*, our ultimate destination, either following *Bhaktimārga*, or *Jñānamārga* or *Karmamārga* as it suits us best. Vivekananda also believes the same. He says that this diversity of path or faith should not be denied because unity in diversity is the plan of the universe. So, to deny this diversity of path or opinion is to go against the law of nature. We all are human beings but yet each and every one of us is different from others. This difference is necessary for the healthy progress of our society. Keeping this view in mind Swamiji says, "I pray that they (sects) multiply so that at last there will be as many sects as human beings and each one will have its own method, his individual method of thought in religion."⁵

So, according to Vivekananda, we have to follow the principle of nature, i.e. unity in diversity and allow all religions to exist and grow in order to ensure the social as well as spiritual progress. No two religions are contradictory. One religion is supplementary to the other. One religion represents one part of the universal truth; the other parts of the truth are represented by other religions. Thus, all religions together help an individual to know the whole truth. Swamiji says, "... all these religions are different forces in the economy of God, working for the good of mankind..."⁶ if one religion claims that it alone knows the whole truth then this claim is a dogmatic one. So, to attain a progressive and total knowledge of the universal truth all religions of the world must meet together and learn something from the other. But, here a problem crops up. If one religion manifests the universal truth or universal religion partly then the universality represented by it will be a partial universality and partial universality is not universality at all. Vivekananda is aware of this problem and an attempt has been made by him to solve the problem. He says, "...universal religion about which philosophers and others have dreamed in every country already exists. It is here. As the universal brotherhood of man already exists, so also is universal religion too, is already existing." When we speak of brotherhood then thereby we do not refer to any partial brotherhood, we refer to the essence of all brothers. Brothers are many but the brotherhood, underlying all brothers, is essentially one. Similarly, religions are many, but the essence of all religions is universality which is one.

The same concept has been explained by Swami Vivekananda more elaborately and beautifully. Vivekananda says, " As a man you are separate from woman, as a human being you are separate from the animal, but as living beings, man, woman, animal and plants all are one; and as existence, you are all one. At the same time, in manifestation these differences must always remain."⁷ One may think that Swamiji has prescribed for another religion called universal religion. This conception is fully wrong. Vivekananda reminds us, "...if by the idea of a universal religion it is meant that one set of doctrines should be believed in all mankind, it is wholly impossible."⁸ So, from this it is clearly understood that there can be no another religion known as 'Universal Religion' over and above the existing religions. By 'Universal Religion' Swamiji intends to mean that there is universal character more or less in all religions.

Generally conflict arises in the world of religion mainly on two issues, one is the nature of God and another is the way or path leading to God. We came across different conflicting views regarding the nature of God. Some say that God is *nirguṇa* and some say that God is *saguṇa*; some think that God is visible, some again opine that God is invisible; some say that *Kṛṣṇa* is God; some on the other hand observe that *Kālī* is God. Thus, the conflict crops up. One usually thinks that if God is one and the same, as it is stated by Swamiji and Ramakrishna, then how can one and the same God be both visible and invisible? How can He be *Kṛṣṇa* and *Kālī* both?

This problem, I think, will be solved if we understand that one and the same thing may be in different states, having different characteristics. Water, for example, is liquid, visible and has the power to quench our thirst. But, if the temperature of water is increased and it reaches more than one hundred degree centigrade then it turns into vapor. In that state it becomes invisible and loses the power to quench thirst. Again if the temperature of water gets down and it reaches less than zero degrees centigrade then it becomes solid and gains a particular shape and size. Likewise, one and the same God may be in different states and accordingly it may be visible or invisible, *Kṛṣṇa* or *Kālī*.

Ramakrishna says that the power of burning is inseparable from fire, so in one sense they are identical. Similarly *Kṛṣṇa* or *Kālī* are inseparable and therefore they are identical. Here, though the object is one and the same but as it runs through different states the observation made in different states becomes different. But, even if one and the same object remains in one and the same states without undergoing any change yet two observations made by two different persons may be different. For example, if a person X say with the height of 5th feet and 10th inches asks two person, one coming from Punjab and another coming from Darjeeling, whether he is tall or not, then there is every possibility that the former will say that Mr. X is a person having shorter height but the latter will say that X is a tall person. Here the height of Mr. X remains fixed but in spite of that observations made by two persons become different simply because of the difference of their socio-cultural platforms. The same is equally true in the case of religion. One and the same person may be described differently by different persons. One and the same man may be described as father, son, husband, officer and so on. But, there is no contradiction. He is father to his

children, but son to his parents; he is husband to his wife, but officer to his subordinates. Likewise, one and the same God may be father-figure to some devotees to some He is son-figure and again to some other He is master or husband like. To some God is *nirguṇa* but to some other He is *saguṇa*. To some God is *Kṛṣṇa* and again to some God is *Kālī*. To understand all these what is necessary is to open our eyes of reason. The moment we become rational we come out from the suffocating state of dogmatism and understand as Vivekananda says that every religion consists of two layers, one is external and the other is internal. External layer consists of three units – Philosophy, mysticism and rituals. Internal layer is God which is nothing but the ultimate goal or destination of religion. One religion is different from another religion so far as the first layer is concerned. But, so far as the second layer is concerned one religion cannot be different from the other religions. Philosophy, mysticism and rituals differ from religion to religion, but God does not. So, it remains unchanged in all religions. Chair, table, bench, door and windows etc are different one from another so far as their shape and size are concerned but as far as the matter is concerned all of them are one and the same, as all of them are made from wood. The ring and the chain are, no doubt, different but yet they are same as both of them are made of gold. Some bring water with a jar and some bring the same with a bucket. But all of them bring water. Some water is of ponds, some of river, some again of sea, but after all of them are water. Similarly, some God is prayed from temple, some God is prayed from Church, but all of them pray for God. Some food may be eaten sitting on chair in dining hall or standing in the drawing room. Likewise, one and the same God may be prayed from different places, it may be temple or mosque or church no matter. One goes to market putting on pant and shirt, one putting on dhuti and Punjabi, and the third one with lungi and kurta. But, the purpose of all of them is the same i.e. to purchase vegetable and other things. In the same way, followers of different religions may put on different cloths but the purpose of all of them is the same i.e. to pray for God. So, the concept of God acts as a linking thread running through each and every religion. In a garland the flowers, the units are different but the thread make all of them united. Likewise, so far as the Philosophy, mysticism and rituals are concerned one religion is different from other religions, but all of them are interlinked by the concept of one and the same God. But, here a question may be

raised – is it really so? We come across some religions where there is no room for God. Jaina religion, Buddha religion and sometimes even the Hindu religion as it is interpreted by Mīmāṃsā Philosophy are the living example of them. The problem crop up only because we fail to understand the very sense in which the concept of God has been used here. Here, the term ‘God’ has been used in the sense of ‘Spirituality or Divinity’. In each and every religion, if it is religion in the true sense of the term, there must be the place for ‘Spirituality or Divinity’. The attainment of God or Spirituality or Divinity is the ultimate aim of all religions. We all are pregnant with spirituality or divinity. And the aim of us is to manifest our spirituality through religion. That is why Swamiji says that ‘religion is the manifestation of Divinity within’.

Vivekananda says that religious conflict arises because we care for temple, mosque, church, doctrines etc. Keeping this in mind he advises us not to care for all these. He says, “Religion is neither temple nor mosque, nor doctrines nor... it is realization”. But realization of what? Realization is in the form of ‘I am perfect,’ ‘I am Divine’, and ‘I am Brahman’ (Aham Brahmāsmi, Tvam asi). Realization of this truth is the ultimate goal of each and every religion. Here, a pertinent question may arise – How can I be identical with Brahman or God (Jivaḥ Brahmaiva nāparaḥ)? Brahman is unlimited but I am limited. So, how can I ‘limited and finite being’ be identical with an unlimited and infinite being? But, I think that if we try to understand the very spirit of the logic of Swamiji then this problem goes. I am identical with Brahman, I think, in the sense in which an egg of hen is identical with hen, a banyan seed is identical with banyan tree. An egg can neither walk nor take food but a hen can do so. A banyan seed does not have any branch or leafs but a banyan tree has its branches and leaves. The former cannot give us oxygen but the latter can do so. The seed is very small in size but the tree is very big. In spite of all these differences the former ones are identical with the latter ones. An egg is a potential hen. An egg has every potentiality for being a hen. A banyan seed has all potentialities to be a banyan tree. Likewise a man has every potentiality for being Brahman or God. The hen is within the egg, the banyan tree is within the seed of it. Similarly Brahman or God, the unlimited and ultimate being is within man, the limited being. Rabindranath Tagore also believes the same. He says, “Sīmār mājhe aśīm tumi bāzao apon sur, Āmār

madhye tomār prakāś taai ato madhur.” Vivekananda says that in order to uproot religious fundamentalism and resolve religious conflict what is essential is to accept other religions rather than to tolerate them. He holds that toleration is necessary but acceptance is more necessary. If we understand the very spirit of the universal religion of Vivekananda we cannot but accept the other religions. If we cannot accept the other religions from the very core of our mind then our dogmatic attitude will continue to play its foul play. Keeping this in view Swamiji says, “We take in all that has been in the past, enjoy the light of the present and open our every window of the heart for all that will come in the future.”⁹

References:

1. D. Mial Edwards, *The Philosophy of Religion*, p.9
2. Swami Vivekananda, *Jñāna yoga*, p.8
3. Swami Vivekananda, *The Complete Works*, vol.2, p.379
4. Ibid, vol.2 p.383
5. Ibid, vol.2, p.364
6. Ibid, vol.2, p.366
7. Ibid, vol.2, p.381
8. Ibid, vol.2, p.382
9. Ibid, vol.2, p.374