

## **Philosophy of Swami Vivekananda: A Critical Study**

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**ABSTRACT:** Swami Vivekananda played an important role in re-moulding the Indian life. He was one of the greatest social reformers of India. As a greatest disciple of Sri. Ramakrishna Paramahansa, Swami Vivekananda carried the message of his master all over India, Europe and America. In 1893, he attended the Parliament of Religions held in Chicago. He created a sensation in the great assembly by his brilliance and nobility. His views and ideals played an important role in the reconstruction of India as a nation.

**KEY WORDS:** Philosophy, Harmony, Sectarianism, Brotherhood, Democracy

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### **I. INTRODUCTION**

Swami Vivekananda is often mistaken when he is connected to religion alone. This conception of Vivekananda is a complete foolery. He was a real patriot in the sense that he wanted the spiritual as well as the material advancement of the people as a whole. He was not hero of action like Alexander the Great, Napoleon or Gandhiji. But he was a divinely inspired leader who successfully infused a new hope in man.

Swami Vivekananda was born in Calcutta on Monday the 12<sup>th</sup> of January 1863. His original name was Narendranath. His father Viswanath was an established lawyer in the High Court of Calcutta and had a progressive outlook on life. At his early days onwards Narendranath took great interest in western knowledge and the culture of other lands. This attitude developed in him the qualities of open mindedness, a questioning spirit and uprightness and manliness in conduct. As a young boy he noticed that Hindus and Muslims who used to visit houses used separate glasses. He said “ I cannot see what difference, it makes, there is no Hindu water and no Muslim water”<sup>i</sup>. This attitude developed in early dates itself prompted him to oppose the caste system strongly. He had developed the universal outlook and principle of equality.

To understand the work and achievements of Vivekananda, it is necessary to have an understanding of his ideals on various aspects of human life. He deviated from the general philosophical approach of Indian sages. He was like Gautama Buddha who gave importance to the work of removing human misery rather than try to discuss the nature of truth. He declared that he was starting “a crusade against all that is false and against the real spirit of religion”<sup>ii</sup>.

### **Vedas and Upanishads – way for salvation**

Vivekananda believed that, the source of Hindu religion and cultures were Vedas. He was more attracted by the philosophy of the Upanishads because it prepared the way for human salvation. No other literature in the world presents such a clear philosophy for the liberation of man from worldly bondage. He believed that Upanishads are a source of strength and create confidence in man. The Upanishads ask people to shed all weakness, pessimism towards life teach man to face the world with strength and vigour again. Vivekananda found in the Upanishad the principles of a universal religion. The principles of Upanishads inspired him very much and helped in moulding the character and philosophy of Vivekananda. The teaching of Gautama Buddha was another important force that influenced him very much. Buddha renounced the world not for his own salvation but for the salvation of the whole mankind which was suffering from all kinds of misery. The eternal message of Buddha was a theme very dear to Vivekananda. The teachings of Buddha established a silken bond of fellowship and love between different groups of people and it forms one of the arresting episodes of human history.

### **Concept of Universal Religion**

The Universalism of Buddhist principles attracted the attention of Vivekananda and like Buddha he also becomes a world spiritual leader. "All his work in east or west was to summon men and women to the spiritual heritage. He taught them to realise the divine that us embedded in man."<sup>iii</sup> All the activities of Vivekananda had one single objective. His primary object was to give to man the priceless gift of self-knowledge. The way he developed the spiritual self-confidence makes him a unique personality in human history. His conceptions of religion were revolutionary one in the sense that it differed from the conceptions of other sages of the past and present. Religion was considered by him as the healthiest exercise that the human mind could have. At the same time religion constitute the basis of human mind could have. At the same time religion constitute the basis of human conflicts throughout the world. Instead of playing the role of a unifying factor religion divided people. This happened because people fail to understand that different religion had the same goal. This happens because of the ritualistic domination of religion. He stood for the fusion of all religion in to one universal religion. Man has to accept the variations in religion and beliefs as a sign of life and an essential trait of mankind. To make the people understand this feature of religion, he spoke and acted to explain the conception of religion to people.

### **Establisher of Religious harmony**

According to him all religion must have a positive approach. It must teach man to resist from doing evil things. At the same time people must learn from religion. He believed that humanity without religion will be a mass of brutes. It constitutes the most important lesson taught by Vivekananda on matters of religion. All religions should teach love and mutual tolerance as the cardinal principles of religion. All believers of God must race that is the test of true religiousness. All believers of God must preach tolerance and religious universality. If one religious is true, then all must be true. He insisted on harmony, peace and good will and discarded fanaticism, rivalries and heated discussions.

Vivekananda stood and worked for the spiritual integration of mankind. He said "our minds are like vessels and each of us tries to arrive at a realisation of God. God is like the water that fills the different vessels of different shapes. In each vessel the vision of god takes a different form. Yet he is one, he is God in every sense."<sup>iv</sup> By this expression Vivekananda was presenting a very valuable lesson before humanity. He was presenting the fact that the apparent contradictions in different religions are not real. The message of Vivekananda was for the unity of human society, which would have made much progress in history, if there was no sectarianism, fanaticism and violence in the name of religion.

In establishing religious harmony, Vivekananda considered the Vedanta Philosophy as the best suitable basis. Vedanta harmonised all the various aspirations of man. Explaining this point Vivekananda said "Love every man as your own self and not as your brother, in Christianity. Brotherhood should be superseded by universal self – hood"<sup>v</sup>. Like Buddha, Vivekananda also believed that God exists not in the idols or temples but on the other hands he rests with in one self. Therefore by purity of action and thought one can attain Godhood and by this method everyone can attain Godhood and by this method everyone can attain salvation and equality before God. The Vedanta philosophy was the best suitable method for reaching this spiritual sphere of progress. Thus the universal religion of Vivekananda believed that no man of religion can persecute another man. The rational broad minded nature of Vivekananda helped in spreading this universal aspect of Hinduism and he succeeded in presenting Hinduism as a religion of tolerance and universal acceptance.

### **Vedanta – Heart of Religion**

The heart of his religion was Vedanta. It was revealed by intuition, experience and actual realisation by seers and prophets. It is their recorded thoughts and feelings that are to be found in the Vedas, Upanishads, Geetha and other works. Sri. Ramakrishna was a living embodiment of the religion these scriptures contain.

In Vedanta, Vivekananda found most suitable philosophy for establishing an understanding of harmony between different religions. He argued that Vedanta can be the basis of a universal religion of man. He treated Hinduism not as an ordinary religion. According to him it was the very manifestation of the divinity already in man. The arguments of Vivekananda clearly stated the point: "every soul is a sun covered with clouds of ignorance. The difference between the soul and soul is owing to the difference in the density of these layers of clouds. This is the conscious or unconscious basis of all religion and this is the explanation of the whole history of human progress, either in the material, intellectual or spiritual play"<sup>vi</sup>.

### **Believer in Democracy**

Vivekananda was a believer in democracy. According to him no Nation could gain physical freedom without physical quality. He had great concern for the common man in India. On one occasion he wrote, "Forget not that the lower classes the ignorant, the poor, the illiterate, the cobbler, the sweeper are thy flesh and blood, the brothers."<sup>vii</sup> Vivekananda had a vision about these common people of India and he was of the opinion that a

true religion must give a helping hand to these millions of people who were suffering due to poverty. He wanted to organize the youth of India and send them like waves over India, bringing comfort, morality, religion and education to the dolls of the meanest and the most down trodden.

### **A Social Reformer**

Vivekananda was not only a spiritual leader but also a great social reformer as well. His views on society were realistic and pragmatic at the same time he wanted to evolve society as a divine institution and that society must develop the highest truth in life. He asked the people to understand that behind the strong and the weak there was the same infinite soul. He was against all types of social injustice and had the dream of a harmonious social order based on the lofty ideals of freedom and equality. He treated caste of any type as a symbol of bondage. He taught the principle of human equality and urged the Indian people to abolish the cruel, irrational and unjust practices like untouchability.

## **II. CONCLUSION**

Swami Vivekananda was a divinely inspired leader who successfully infused a new hope in man. He acted as a link between the East and the West and played his efficient role spreading the great values of Indian culture. Nehru remembered in his 'Discovery of India' that "Vivekananda was a man who was proud of the past but did not want to live in the past<sup>viii</sup>". Vivekananda exhorted Indians to strike a healthy balance between the western and eastern elements of human civilisation. He guided India and the world community as a whole new horizon of knowledge and developed a new hope of love, peace and progress for humanity. If Indian traditions and culture are valued and respected abroad today, India is indebted to, this great son of India.

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