

INDIAN CULTURE AND WORLD-PEACE

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Abstract

It is seen that the rich Vedanta tradition of India and various religious trends of Indian soil have shown their kin interest to promote world peace. And also the ideologies of some of the philosophers of modern India like Swami Vivekananda, Tagore and Mahatma Gandhi, are quite favorable for the establishment of global peace. In the first part, how the principle of unity is the basic ideology of Vedanta and the Buddhist message of Panca Shila contributed effectively to the restoration of the social harmony, peace and universal appeal has been dealt with. That the principle of ahimsa has been preached by Jaina Tirthankarsis also an attempt to establish world peace. In the second part the ideologies of Vivekananda, Tagore and Gandhi have been taken into account. The notion of the Universal Religion of Swami Vivekananda, the notion of True Religion of Tagore and the Gandhian approach to peace by the principle of non-violence is analyzed. Thus the contribution of Indian culture to world peace is noticed to be very much positive.

Keywords: *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam, Ekatvam, Panca-Shila, Ahimsa, Universal Religion, True Religion*

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The Encyclopedic understanding of the concept of world peace is found as “World peace is an idea of planetary non-violence by which nations willingly cooperate, either voluntarily or by virtue of a system of governance that prevents warfare. The term is sometimes used to refer to a cessation of all hostility among all humanity.” It is a truism that world peace is a global necessity. For longer sustenance of the earth if anything is significantly required then it is global peace. Each nation of the earth must participate in the program of world peace. India, as one of the major nations of the globe, has shown its concern for world peace in various ways. It is seen that the religious trends of Indian soil have shown their deep interest in world peace. Besides the above, some of the remarkable philosophers of modern India like Swamy Vivekananda, Rabindra Nath Tagore and Mahatma Gandhi, have contributed significantly to the restoration of global peace. So far as the contribution of Indian tradition is concerned we can view it in two parts, namely, of ancient India and modern India.

The ideologies of Ancient India**The Vedanta tradition**

The most important consideration is that people have a different understanding about Vedanta that it is based on other-worldly considerations and promotes asceticism. With this understanding how can it help in the establishment of peace in the global level? First of all, let me clarify the proper aim of Vedanta philosophy. At least it is uncontroversial that all most all the Upanisads advocate in support of the *Advaita* (non-dualistic) stand for which it is also named as *Advaita Vedanta*. Non-dualism stands for the non-difference between Atman and Brahman. The knowledge of this non-difference is the highest. I do not find the element of asceticism in obtaining this knowledge. Rather the concept of unity is one of the prime themes of *Vedanta* and happens to be an essential pillar of Vedanta culture.

Vedanta advocates that Brahman is the eternal oneness that has been manifested into the phenomenal world of our experience. Nothing is there, including the sun, earth, moon, what so ever, which has not come out of the eternal unity and which will not go back to the same place of origin after dissolution. The entire Upanisadic literature, that is Vedanta, advocates in support of this unity and emphasizes its realization. In this context as an example, the view of the *Ishaa Upanishad* can be cited that when the oneness of the self is realized by someone for him the hatred for others does not exist and for him, desire or sorrow also cannot exist.¹ The Vedanta ideal has been expressed in the following words of the *Maha Upanisad* that

is *Vasuddhaivakutumbakam* which is generally understood as 'One World - One Family'. It is important to understand and materialize this loftiest ideal of the Vedantic thought that is, the oneness of the soul. This can foster an understanding that the whole of humanity is one family. If this Vedantic ideal of basic unity can be put into practice by humans then global peace will never be a difficult affair.

The Buddhist tradition

The Buddhist philosophy is famous for its doctrines of 'The Four Noble Truths', 'The Middle Path', 'Principles of *Panca Shila*' etc. which are highly effective for the restoration of peace. The four Noble Truths (*catvaariaaryasatyaani*) are not merely indicative of the pessimistic aspects of life. Rather the advocacy of such principles has not allowed a frustrating attitude towards life. The propagation of the eight-fold path (*astaangamaarga*), is in support of character building which is essentially needed in the present situation. The emphasis of *Shila* or right conduct is a mark of moral excellence. The adoption of *Panca Shila* (five basic principles of conduct), those are: (1). Non-killing or non-harming to other living beings, (2). Non-stealing (3). Control over sex or celibacy (4). Truth speaking or non-lying and (5). No uses of intoxicants or alcohol have the potentiality to put the foundation of peace in any part of the globe.

The central message of *Buddhism* is 'everything is sorrowful' (*sarvamdukkham*). The main purpose behind it is to suggest that knowing this one can very well dispel his sorrow. By knowing that the unfulfillment of the desires is the sole cause of suffering one can take an attempt for the complete removal of desires and cravings (*tanhaa*). *Nirvana* can be viewed as a psychological state of calmness based on higher knowledge where the individual can be no more in a state of strife and tension.

It can be seen that in the Buddhist tradition the emphasis has been attached to cultivating positive emotions such as love and compassion. Moreover, world peace can be possible through establishing peace within our minds. For them, peace and harmony can be achieved by abandoning negative emotions such as anger, greed, etc.. Such emotions like anger and similar negative states are found to cause wars. From *Buddhist* tradition we can learn simple and decent living, having a moral foundation.

The Jaina tradition

Ahimsa preached by *Jaina Tirthankar* has effectively helped in establishing peace. For them, the use of weapons against weapons is never beneficial for mankind. Lord *Mahavira* has said in *Acharanga* sutra that one weapon can be stronger than and superior to another. But the path of non-violence for peace remains

unsurpassed ever. Real peace can be established by creating goodwill in an individual soul towards other fellow beings. *Jaina* scriptures say that blood-stained cloth cannot be washed off with blood; there is the need for water for that. Similarly to achieve peace violence has to be stopped.

In the *Jaina* tradition highest importance has been attached to three principles or *Triratnas* (three Jewels). These are essential to achieve the goal of life. For *Jaina* thinkers, the *Triratna* constitutes Right faith (*samyagdasrana*), Right knowledge (*samyagjnana*) and Right conduct (*samyagcaritra*). All three, the philosophy, knowledge and character are to be pursued jointly (*Samyag-darsana-jnana-câritrânimokcamargah*) as the goal of life and living. No other tradition has attached so much importance to character building as the *Jaina* tradition has attached. They have not only mentioned a strict code of conduct (*mahaavrata*) for the monks but also prescribed *anuvratas* for the house holders. The follow up of the ten *dharmic* practices, 'forgiveness, humility, straight forwardness, truthfulness, cleanliness, self-restraint, austerity, sacrifice, non-attachment and celibacy' are quite important for *Jainas*. By emphasizing pure, truthful, non-violent, simple and honest household life, *Jainism* paves the path for world peace.

The ideologies of modern India

It may be pointed out that in shaping the Indian culture in modern India there were/are many stalwart leaders whose contributions are quite noted worthy. But I would like to mention the ideologies of a spiritualist, a litterateur and a social reformer cum statesman and those are namely, Swami Vivekananda, Viswakabi Rabindranath Tagore, and Mahatma Gandhi. It is seen that the ideologies of these philosophers are exemplary and significant in the following manner.

Vivekananda's ideologies

The concern, the Practical Vedantin Swami Vivekananda, has shown for bringing up modern India is unparalleled in the sense that he wanted a revolutionary change in contemporary India through his revolutionary concepts of man, religion and Vedanta. As a lover of peace, he has tried to establish an ethical and spiritual culture that would be a model for the rest of the world. He has written that "No amount of force or government or legislative cruelty will change the conditions of the race, but it is spiritual culture and ethical culture alone that can change wrong racial tendencies for the better."²

Vivekananda has pointed out that the capacity of man lies in going beyond his physical nature. Man is the maker of his destiny and he can realize the oneness of the soul through his spiritual virtue. Man alone can try to establish peace by knowing his true nature. According to him "The only God to worship is the human

soul, in the human body, of course, all animals are temples too, but man is the highest, the TajMahal of temples. If I cannot worship in that, no other temple will be of any advantage.”³

Vivekananda did realize that one of the most effective deterring factors for peace is the attitude toward traditional religion. He realized that so long religions will be confined to temples, churches; etc being controlled by priests the religious differences will time to time create insurmountable problems for mankind. That is why he wanted to clear the misunderstanding concerning the concept of religion by introducing the concept of ‘universal religion’.

Universal religion is not a new religion like that of Hinduism, Sikhism, Jainism, Islam and Christianity. It is not a modified version of Hinduism or a glorified version. He says that when we talk about religion normally we talk about institutional religion which has three aspects, namely, mythology, ritual and philosophy. In respect of mythology and rituals, there must be differences among religions. The most important aspect of a religion is its ideology or philosophy. Ideological differences would be there. But behind those differences, there must be a single motto, which has to be realized. He says that man always proceeds from error to truth and from lesser truth to higher truths. It is because every religion aims at a higher truth, there should not be any narrow approach. Very often we think that one has to ‘tolerate’ other religions. But Vivekananda points out that mere tolerance is not enough. One has to accept its existence. Peace will follow automatically.

Regarding the concept of Practical Vedanta Praharaj mentions that “Practical Vedanta is no less unique in the sense that no Vedantin in the Indian philosophical tradition has ever thought of utilizing the knowledge of Vedanta Philosophy in the day-to-day life of common people. Everyone whose Vedantic knowledge has been considered as the highest knowledge is possible only for him who has attained the stage of realizing the Brahman-Atman relationship. Such a stage is far away from the common man. But Swamiji has taken the novel attempt of putting such Vedanta philosophy into practice. To him, if any theory is impractical, it is useless; it only satisfies the intellectual craze of a being.”⁴

Tagore’s ideologies

The realization of Tagore as ‘war and peace start in the human heart. Whether that heart is open or whether that heart closes has global implications.’ There is no doubt that Tagore was the lover of peace. Very much like Vivekananda he has distinguished between the institutional religion and true religion with

*the understanding that the faith in institutional religion sometimes becomes dangerous for the development of peace in the society and he also considers that to be with the institutional religion is as good as an aimless journey. For him, religion is a sacred voyage that leads towards an eternal home. He was not in the favour of institutional religion for the reason that the activities like prayers, visiting temples, etc, are in no way beneficial for man. Rather it takes away the freedom of man. Man must try the enjoyment of true love which is possible through true religion. He has said that the doors of the temple are not open for those who have realized divinity in them. Tagore has advocated in support of a 'religion of man' instead of a 'religion for man'. There is no necessity that man should search for a suitable religion for him. Tagore has said that "If there is any philosophy of religion in my writings, it amounts to this: to realize the relationship of perfect love between the supreme soul and the souls of all created beings is indeed true religious sense – this love that holds duality on one side non-duality on the other, union as well as separation and bondage along with freedom."*⁵

Tagore says about the institutional religion that "When the religions have to make way for the religious organization it is like the river being dominated by sand beds, the current stagnates and its aspect becomes desert-like"⁶ According to Tagore the institutional religions run after false ideals. Under the influence of such religion, man fails to see the sufferings of his fellow beings. For him, man is not an isolated being. He is a social being. Man's essence is very noble. He becomes perturbed when he finds his fellow beings are in distress. The inner essence of man is his dharma. Tagore prefers the term dharma in place of religion. Man must not forget his dharma which consists in man's capacity of self-transcendence or going beyond himself. The cultivation of love and the attempt to enjoy it will make a man religious. Once the influence of the dogmatic religion goes away man realizes the Vedanta ideal of unity and proceeds towards peace.

Gandhian ideologies

Let me start with Douglas Allen's view on Gandhi that "When one thinks of modern leaders identified with "non-violence" and "peace", the name of Mahatma Gandhi is most often cited, not only in India but also throughout the world."⁷ He is the person who once said 'How can I make difference so that I may bring peace to the world that I love and cherish so much?' It shows that while thinking about the contribution of modern Indian leaders for world peace the contribution of a reformist statesman like Gandhi cannot be overlooked.

It may be pointed out that as a votary of non-violence Gandhi was in support of the peace. But it may be made clear that for him non-violence is neither cowardice nor withdrawing from facing any challenge. Non-violence is an effective, active, positive, moral as well as truthful and transformative force to meet any challenge peacefully. “For Gandhi, “peace” cannot be defined simply as the absence of armed conflict or active hostile conflict. Gandhi analyzes such a “peace,” even with the absence of overt violence, as revealing states of political war, economic war, psychological war, cultural war religious war and other forms of war. Such pervasive states of war reveal multidimensional structural violence and lack of egalitarian relations, justice respect for human integrity, and civilizational and cosmic harmony that preconditions for the realization of true non-violence and peace.”⁸ Gandhi as a practical idealist did not simply talk about such an ideal state of peace but the entire program of achieving such an idea was conceived by him through the practice of some other practices like *Satya, ahimsa, satyagraha, etc.* The entire approach of Gandhi can be treated as the preventive approach for any kind of violence.

To sum up, world peace presupposes a higher estimation of human worth, the spiritualization of day-to-day life and a perfect understanding about own religion. Such a culture is peace-oriented and its base can be traced from the Indian culture.

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