

# The Necessity of Religion and Swami Vivekananda's Approach

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## **Abstract**

*In the paper attempt has been taken to examinewhether religion is a human necessity or not. Hetu vadi rationalists suggest that it should be given up. But it is seen that Swami Vivekananda has advocated in support of the Universal Religion with the supposition that it is the need of human society in all ages. For him it is neither a new religion nor the glorification of any definite religion. Rather every religion shares the universality which should be realized by the followers of the religion. For Swami Vivekananda the progress of mankind consists not in the material gain or accumulation of the material goods but in the development of the spiritual wisdom.*

*I have tried to point out that for the development of morality in man there is the necessity of the spiritual development in man. Such a stage can easily be achieved through a religion. Religion in its proper spirit makes a man more humanistic than mechanistic. So there is the need of the religion in any age. I think the approach of rationalist group of thinkers to give up the religion does not appear to be logical in the sense it would be improper to consider a religionist to be irrational. Religion and rationality can go together and are not antagonistic to each other.*

## **Krywords**

*Humanistic, Religion, Necessity.*

Reference to this paper should be made as follows:

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*RJPP 2018, Vol. 16, No. 1, pp 69-74, Article No. 9*

*Received on 12/01/2018*

*Approved on 31/01/2018*

**Online available at :**

*[http://anubooks.com/?page\\_id=2004](http://anubooks.com/?page_id=2004)*

It is a fact that no record is available when and how some of the religions have come to existence. Regarding the origin of religions like Buddhism and Jainism has records. But a religion like *Sanatana dharma* does not carry any record regarding its origin. It is found to be providing unchallengeable guiding principles to Hindus since time immemorial. The religion is treated by Hindus as sacred as God, and supposed to carry the end point of all religious thoughts. But with the advancement of the sciences and the materialistic temperaments the necessity of a religion has been challenged from various corners. It has been claimed that the religions, instead bringing unity, are found to be responsible for sectarian attitudes. Behind many of the communal riots religions are said to be at the root. Some do not hesitate to say that bitterness of caste feelings is not only the part of religious considerations but also nourished by religionists. (For them, had there been no religion, there would not have been any caste discriminations). This is how religion, specially the *Santana dharma* of Hindus, has been facing with various challenges from various corners. Before dealing with the challenges brought forward against the religion/ religious activities I would like to spell out few lines on our understanding about the religion.

It is usually taken for granted that primary feature of the religion is that it is connected with super-sensuous realm. It deals with such factors which are beyond all reasoning and away from the intellectual plane. "It is a vision, an aspiration, a plunge into the unknown and unknowable, making the more than known, for it can never be 'known'."1

"Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan writes that "All seers, whatever be their sects or religions to which they belong, ask us to rise to the conceptions of a God above Gods, who is beyond image and concepts, who can be experienced but not known, who is the vitality of the human spirit and the ultimacy of all that exists. This is the highest kind of religion- the practice of the presence of God."2 The above two contemporary thinkers have given the picture of religion what usually people think about the religion. However, by and large, a conceptual framework of a religion centres round some scriptures, some mythological and theological ideas, may be some cosmological doctrines, etc. All these are linked with some stories, legends, rituals, metaphysics and morals.

It is a fact that with the advancement of science such above mentioned understanding about religion has become a less acceptable and less appealing in the modern society. It is seen that the majority of youth and many people with higher education do not prefer to be the part of the religion in any manner. It is further seen that few challenges against religion have come to forefront in the following manner.

Is there any relevance of religion? Does the modern society need religion? Will religion serve the need of the hour? Etc. In this context I once again try to mention the view subscribed by Vivekananda that “Taking for granted that the known and the knowable are bounded on both sides by the unknowable and the infinitely unknown? Why shall we not be content with the known? Why shall we not rest satisfied with eating, drinking and doing little good to society?”<sup>3</sup>

To such type of queries of Vivekananda the following view of ‘religion’, as shared by many scholars of religious minded people, has a lot of significance. They are of the opinion that “there is no tribe, no race, no community and no people who do not have religion in one form or other? Because for them, the urge for religion is a basic urge of human beings. The religious urge is innate and religious consciousness is native to human mind. It is a natural and primal urge of human being to which he cannot afford to give up. Consciously or unconsciously he is dragged to such state of mind. To quote a supporter of this stand “The urge for religious pursuits expresses itself in the tendency to move from state of limitedness and imperfection to the higher states of existence, characterized by greater completeness, happiness and harmony. This is true not only of human beings but also of all existents, inanimate and animate. Studies on evolution of species clearly indicate that there is the tendency (*nisus*) to evolve from state of lesser harmony to greater harmony on the part of the non-human species. It is more explicitly manifest in humans who are not only conscious of the dynamics but have the added capacity to cultivate it with jest and intelligence. Thus, ‘religion’ can be seen as an elemental necessity which is self-consciously pursued by the humans.”<sup>4</sup>

Vivekananda takes it differently in the sense that ‘man finds himself driven’ to the study of the beyond, and it is religion that makes the inquiry into the beyond. For him, if man remains content with the present and would not have plunged into the task of searching the beyond then ‘mankind will have to go back to the animal plane again.’

Regarding the irrelevant aspect of the religion maximum emphasis has been attached by a group of people who consider themselves to be rationalists (*hetu vadi*). It is taken for granted by them that it is not God who has created man, rather it is man who has created God. That means the concept of God is the product of human search for the beyond. They deny the possibility of any type of supernatural power. Moreover, their supposition is that humanism and religion cannot go together. Humanism is possible by giving up the religion and following the rationalistic attitudes. Nothing about religion can be established through rational insight.

Such a view against religion can be thought of only against pure dogmatic followers of the religious rituals of the religions. But there is no religious principle that is recommended to be followed dogmatically when man is a rational animal and usually does not honour his own religious rituals without understanding the real aim of religious ideals. Sometimes it is seen that some people often follow certain religious rituals dogmatically. That is why Tagore, Gandhi, Vivekananda have tried to bring a distinction between 'true religion' and 'institutional religion'. It is true that most of the religions are committed to some supernatural power and accept it to be the highest authority. But at the same time those embrace human emotions and become a booster for morality. It cannot be said that any two of spirituality, religion and morality are antithetical. Rather true spiritualism lies in an attitude of universalism being founded on morality. Thus the religious outlook is based on spiritual-cum-moral foundations and is not against the socio-humanistic considerations. Rather the absence of it may enhance materialistic, individualistic and hedonistic attitudes.

It may be pointed out that the institutional religions which are thriving since the dawn of the civilizations are not free from the shortcomings or limitations. Vivekananda was no less critical about the existing religions. He was of the opinion that with the existing religions one can see both the good and bad outputs. Prasad puts this view in a nice manner that "Vivekananda is alive to the fact that religions, which have immense power in them, have often done more harm to the world than good. He remarks that though there is nothing that has brought to man more blessings than religion, yet at the same time, there is nothing that has brought more horror than religion; nothing has made more peace and love than religion, but at the same time nothing has engendered more fierce hatred than religion; nothing has built more charitable institutions, more hospitals for man, than religion but at the same time nothing has deluged the world with more blood than religion.<sup>5</sup> Still the religions continue to occupy significant place in the majority of the human psyche. So instead of taking a radical stand, as suggested by some extremists, to abolish the religions attempt should be taken to review the religion to make it more effective for better social environment. In this respect I would like to mention Swami Vivekananda's stand which seems to advocate that it is religion only which can contribute significantly for the welfare of human society.

Vivekananda has introduced a new concept in field of religious studies, that is, Universal Religion. For him without proper spiritual awakening no welfare of the society is possible, so there is the need of a Universal religion for the spiritual awakening of man. Man cannot grow with the orthodox attitudes of institutional religions. But

for this reason man should not throw away his religion. Moreover man cannot be satisfied with eating, drinking and doing some good to the society wherever necessary. Vivekananda considers human life will be desert and futile if he is unable to have the knowledge of the 'beyond' (sensuous world). According to him religion "brings to man what he is and, and will make of this human animal god".<sup>6</sup> For him the progress of mankind is not more linked with the accumulation of material goods, rather linked with the accumulation of spiritual wisdom which can be possible through true religion. Here it is not suggested to search after a new religion. Nor even it is suggested to glorify one's own religion by saying that it is a Universal religion. It is only emphasized that there is the need of a Universal Religion in the sense that one has to find out the universality aspect of his own religion and follow it.

Vivekananda has made a significant analysis of the cases of 'religion' in the following manner. According to him every religion has three aspects, namely, ritual, mythology and philosophy. Setting forth of the goal and the basic principles of the religion and the means for the attainment of it constitutes its philosophy. The story of moral and spiritual adventures related to it constitutes the mythological aspect of the religion. The functions and ceremonies, which keep people engaged in religious activities, are the ritual aspect of the religions. A close look will reveal that religions differ in respect the mythologies and rituals. But they share more or less same philosophy. The rise above such petty differences is to move towards Universal religion. This idea is very much clear in the words of Lal: The elements of Universal religion would consist in recognizing that there may be various and different ways of approach to the religious object. It gives perfect liberty to the individual in this regard.  
7

Vivekananda considers that "Religion is realization, not talk, nor doctrines, nor theories...".<sup>8</sup> For him no religion is individualistic. It has a social content and it provides a secure foundation in an ultimate sanction to morality also. A true religion helps man to rise above ordinary evils and paves the path towards the Universal religion. According to him a religion must have two factors in order to be treated as Universal religion.<sup>9</sup>

(I) It should keep its gate open to every individual, even for the persons of the other religions.

The religion should be capable of giving comfort and satisfaction to the individuals of other religious sects. The religion should appear reasonable in order to be universal.

For him the believer in the Universal religion has to be broad-minded and open hearted. He should be prepared for learning any kind of scriptural knowledge and should be open-minded to all sorts of religious thoughts. In this respect mere 'tolerance' to other religions is not enough. A follower of Universal religion must have the nature of 'acceptance' feeling towards other religions. Thus one who shares the above mentioned characteristics he can find the universality of his own religion and he will be able to treat his religion universal. Universal religion is not a separate religion.

Thus I would like to conclude that for the development of morality in man there is the necessity of the spiritual development in man. Such a stage can easily be achieved through Universal religion. Religion in its proper spirit makes a man more humanistic than mechanistic. So there is the need of the religion in any age. I think the approach of rationalist (*hetu vadi*) group of thinkers does not appear to be logical in the sense it would be improper to consider a religionist to be irrational. Religion and rationality can go together and are not antagonistic to each other.

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