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## INTER-RELIGIOUS HARMONY FROM THE STANDPOINTS OF SRI RAMAKRISHNA AND SWAMI VIVEKANANDA, AND ITS RELEVANCE IN CONTEMPORARY INDIA.

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**Abstract:-** It is a fact that religion can play a multi-dimensional role in maintaining a peaceful society. Swami Vivekananda viewed that nothing is stronger resource to change the humanity than religion. Indian culture gloriously witnessed a peaceful living of multi-races. Today the atmosphere of disharmony needs the teachings of Ramakrishna and Vivekananda who taught constantly all religions are nothing but lead to the same goal, so conversion is nothing but waste of time. Many worthy messages of both, Ramakrishna and Vivekananda are relevant today in India which is the second most populated country in the world and is the most diverse in religious, cultural and lingual sphere. The future of India is bleak if religious conflicts tear the democratic fabric away and create conditions of communal riots. Therefore, in this country teachings of both, Ramakrishna and Vivekananda should be introduced more seriously to establish inter-religious harmony in India.

**Keywords:** Inter-religious Harmony, Standpoints, Relevance in Contemporary, multi-dimensional.

### INTRODUCTION:

It is a fact that, it is only religion which can constitute a society more peaceful as well as harmful. It is religion which can make mankind more kind as well as more aggressive. It is religion which teaches the art of saving as well as killing of lives. Thus, religion can lead carries a healthy as well as a destructive future of a nation. In addition to this, we can mention a valuable, saying of Vivekananda has made more for peace and love than religion; nothing has engendered fiercer hatred than: "And thus we find that, though there is nothing that has brought to man more blessing than religion, yet at the same time, there is nothing that has brought more horror than religion. Nothing religion. Nothing has made the brotherhood of man more tangible than religion. Nothing has built more charitable institutions, more hospitals for men and even for animals, than religion; nothing has deluged the world with more blood than religion".<sup>1</sup> Then, is religion a curse rather than boon for a society? It is not at all. It is like nuclear which is depended on the utilization of Humanity to make a nation healthy or dangerous. We have to understand the merits and demerits of a religion. Surely, religions play a key role for a healthy mankind. What is, then, the problem in it? The most serious problem about a religion is its plurality or diversity.<sup>2</sup> And the most

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effective remedy is its conception of inter-religious harmony. It is traditionally well-known from the History that India has been home for centuries to most of the all great religions of the world.<sup>3</sup> In fact, India is the most diverse place in the world geographically, culturally, linguistically, and even religiously. India's glorious past bore witness how it has brought up multi-religious cultures. Even, there were Sufi and Bhakti traditions of Islam and Hinduism in India. Both traditions respected religions of each other, hence the lower caste Hindus and the poorer Muslims were greatly influenced by these traditions, and they were unlike some of the cruel Brahmins and Muslim Sultanates who sought their own pleasures. In the modern era, two great sages, for the first time, preached religious harmony which persist not only in India but also reached far the West, were Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda. The former, master preached 'Sarva-dharma-Samanvaya' in Bengal, while the later, greatest Disciple reconstructed his master's message and preached Universal Religion in the West.

Before discussing the conception of the inter-religious harmony, we have to understand the conceptions of some inter-religious attitudes which will help us to extract the concept of harmony. Alan Race (1993) in his *Christians and Religious Pluralism* (SMC Press, London) has discussed about these attitudes i.e., exclusivism, inclusivism and pluralism. We will present them briefly. i) The most antonymous term of religious harmony is perhaps exclusivism which views that one's own religion alone is true and all other religions are false, therefore it views that one particular tradition teaches the truth only to lead to the way of salvation, and other are false.<sup>4</sup> Here Judaism may be enlisted,<sup>5</sup> and it is on the basis of their exclusive identity as God's chosen people.<sup>6</sup> They claimed their religion as the classical paradigm of a God-made religion.<sup>7</sup> Another greatest point can be taken into account that there is no conversion, it means no other religious follower can convert to this religion,<sup>8</sup> it is the religion which believes in their divine blood. Moreover, being a step ahead, Heiler pointed out that 'the Western religious traditions in their attitudes to other faiths are traditionally exclusive'.<sup>9</sup> ii) The second attitude is inclusivism which occupies the middle position between inter-religious harmony and exclusivism. It does not view like inclusivism that no religion is true except one's own religion, it is the view that other religions may not be false but his own religion is true, and others are included in his religion. Islam propagates fully this attitude, and then Christianity, Buddhism. They, therefore, can be here enlisted. These three religions propagate that each of their religion is true for salvation, and other religions are diverted from the true nature. iii) The other attitude is pluralism, and it is the most closest concept with inter-religious harmony. Pluralism views that although all the world religions constitute variant conceptions and perceptions their ultimate goal is same Divine Reality.<sup>10</sup> Here modern Hinduism may be considered in this attitude, which was taught by the two great sage, Ramakrishna and his great disciple, Swami Vivekananda. Now we will verify the last attitude through the teachings of these two sages as follows:

Sri Ramakrishna (1836-1886) was a celibate devotee, who had no formal education but was wise in religious experience.<sup>11</sup> His Religious pluralism can be translated in Indian version as dharma-samanvaya or harmony of religion, and it was his great contribution to the modern world.<sup>12</sup> There are Ramakrishna's few principles on harmony of religions, such as- the first principle is of direct experience rather than deriving from books or intellectual reasoning. His second principle was to respect each religion through eyes of its followers. He never judged any religion by the standards of the religious tradition. His third principle is, his observation all through his life. He never condemned any religion or any religious follower. Many examples can be cited regarding this, as he was born and brought up in an Orthodox Brahmin family, but subsequently he was in contact with the homes of Muslims, Christians, Sikhs etc. Swami Bhajanananda in his notable writings, 'Harmony of Religions from the Standpoint of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda', has mentioned the main tenets of Sri Ramakrishna's doctrine concerning dharma-samanvaya as followings:<sup>13</sup>

D) The ultimate Reality is only one but is known by different names in different religions; it is

Personal as well as Impersonal.

Ramakrishna held that there are supposed to be some ghats on a lake or pool. Just as the Hindus drink water at one place, call it Jal, the Muslims at another place call it pani, and the Christians who drink it at a third place and call it water. There is hardly any difference as all the three denote one and the same thing,<sup>14</sup> in the same way, some address the Reality as Brahman, Rama; as Allah; as God, Jesus.

ii) Realization of the ultimate Reality is the true goal and purpose of human life. It is also the central purpose of all religions. It is this direct transcendent experience that gives validity to religions, and not books.

Ramakrishna did not give priority to religious mythology, customs, rituals as they varied from religion to religion, hence he said, 'when you go to a mango orchard, your primary aim should be to eat mangoes and not to count the leaves, in the same way the primary purpose of religion is to experience God and enjoy divine bliss.'<sup>15</sup>

iii) There are several paths to the realization of the ultimate Reality. Each religion is such a path. Yata mat tata path, 'As many faiths, so many paths'. As paths to the same ultimate goal, all world religions are valid and true.

For this, he used to say, if you have to reach the roof, you can reach it by stone stairs or by wooden stairs or by bamboo steps or by rope, even you can also climb up by a bamboo pole.<sup>16</sup>

iv) But each person should remain steadfast in his own path in a confident spirit, without thinking that his path alone is true and perfect.

According to Ramakrishna, a Christian should follow Christianity, a Muslim should follow his own religion, and the Hindu must follow the ancient path of the Aryan Rishis.<sup>17</sup> Thus, he wanted everyone to stick to his own religion or spiritual path and strive his utmost emphasis to realize the supreme Reality.

v) Furthermore, one should show respect to the founders of all religions as special manifestations of God and, knowing that God dwells in all people, one should serve all without any distinctions of caste, creed, race, etc. (It is worth mentioning to realize that these were the key conceptions of religious harmony).

From the above discussion, we can easily understand that the harmony of religions was profoundly reflected in his speech, acts and messages. He never underestimated any religious faith, on the other hand he encourages every other follower to be firm with his own faith, confidentially believing that his own faith can lead to his expected Supreme Reality rather than being exclusivist as determining in the dogma of extra ecclesiam nulla salus ("Outside the Church, no salvation"),<sup>18</sup> or "One cannot attain anything unless one worships Krishna, or nothing can be gained without the worship of Kali".<sup>19</sup> and the Buddhists often hold that the dhamma which is the teachings of Gautama is alone can liberate humanity from illusion and misery.<sup>20</sup> Hence, he was a firm believer in Pluralism cum Universal religion, the later was exposed by the preaching of his greatest disciple, Swami Vivekananda. Now we will discuss the later in bellow:

It was in the World Parliament of Religions which was held in Chicago in 1893, where the disciple carried his master's message of harmony with the concept of Universal Religion<sup>21</sup> in adding more three corollaries,<sup>22</sup> such as-

**i) Religions of the world are mutually complementary, not contradictory.**

According to Vivekananda, every religion has a soul behind it, and if that soul differs from the soul of another religion; it is not contradictory but supplementary, because to him, each religion takes up one part of the great universal truth.<sup>23</sup>

**ii) There is no need to change one's own religion for another.**

This is the message of Vivekananda's master, who used to say that every man should follow his own religion, therefore, a Christian, Muslim, or Hindu each has to follow his own religion. A Christian would follow Christianity, a Muslim has to follow Islam, and the Hindu would follow the Aryan Path.<sup>24</sup> Vivekananda, thus, emphasized that it is illogical, irrelevant and impossible to establish religious harmony by changing one's own religion, as according to him, believing in one single faith by all the people of the world is impossible, and it is not also proper idea of a universal religion.<sup>25</sup>

**iii) The ideal approach is to accept and assimilate the best elements of other religions while remaining steadfast in one's own religion.**

To Vivekananda, it is the highest wisdom for a man to accept the fact that all religions are true and good.<sup>26</sup> He never wished any Christian to become a Hindu, nor any Buddhist to become a Christian, but he wanted each follower to assimilate the spirit of the others and yet preserve his individuality and grow according to his own law of growth.<sup>27</sup>

From the above discussion it is apparent that all the positive attitudes of inter-religious harmony were present in the ideas of Vivekananda. Not only he indicated the ideas of communal harmony among all the religious followers but he gave the remedy way for it by implementing Universal Religion. His concept of Universal religion was very high in definition, as it is the sum total of the existing world religions.<sup>28</sup> And this universal religion, according to him, exists like universal brotherhood in man eternally. In his universal religion, God is the centre of all religions and we are moving towards Him.<sup>29</sup> Thus, he propagated such a religion which will be equally acceptable to all minds; and the religion must be equally philosophic, equally emotional, equally mystic, and equally conducive to action.<sup>30</sup> To him, religion was realization; and it was not talk, nor doctrine, nor theories, however beautiful these might be, and to him, it was being and becoming, not hearing acknowledging; even it was the whole soul becoming changed into what believed.<sup>31</sup>

**CONCLUSION:**

India is "a sovereign socialist secular democratic republic" country proclaimed on Jan 26, 1950.<sup>32</sup> It contains perhaps the largest and most detailed constitution in the world, and it is for the purposes of securing justice, liberty, and equality for all Indians and to promote fraternity among them.<sup>33</sup> According to the census of 2011, the population of India is 1,210,193,422.<sup>34</sup> There are 14 (subsequently 18) languages are recognized as official in the Indian Constitution,<sup>35</sup> however, there are multi-sub languages. India is, thus, one of the most multi-linguistically, ethnically, and religiously diverse country, where mutual settlement is not possible except the teachings of Ramakrishna and Vivekananda. There is often communal riot taken place among the ignorant and unaware religious followers of India. Governmental policies should be implemented and social organizations have to be active in favor of inter-religious harmony.<sup>36</sup> The religious leaders have to preach the sermons of Ramakrishna and Vivekananda to their own community fellow. In the academic fields, syllabuses containing the teachings of both should be introduced in the schools, colleges and universities throughout the country. Symposiums, seminars, conferences should be conducted frequently for the awareness of mass. The communal harmony is, day by day, becoming bitterer, therefore, the messages of Ramakrishna will be perfect resources for establishing the inter-religious harmony. We have to promote the campaigns on communal harmony more successfully, observed every year from 19 to 25th November in various parts of the country. Even through establishing some of festivals inter-religious harmony can be set up. We all from different religions should remember the metaphor of Vivekananda of many rivers flowing into one mighty ocean, otherwise the future of India is bleak if religious conflicts tear the democratic fabric away and create conditions of communal riots.

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