



Vivekananda's  
concept of  
Universal religion

# Importance and Achievement

- ▶ Played a major role in spiritual enlightenment of Indian masses;
- ▶ Spread Vedanta philosophy in the West; established Ramakrishna Mission (1 may 1897) for the service of the poor.
- ▶ Swami Vivekananda was one of the most influential spiritual leaders of Vedanta philosophy. He was the chief disciple of Ramakrishna was the founder of Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission.
- ▶ Swami Vivekananda was the living embodiment of sacrifice and dedicated his life to the country and yearned for the progress of the poor, the helpless and the downtrodden.
- ▶ He showed a beacon of light to a nation that had lost faith in its ability under British rule and inspired self-confidence among Indians that they are second to none.
- ▶ His ringing words and masterful oratory galvanized the slumbering nation.

- ▶ Swami Vivekanandas real name was Narendranath Dutta.
- ▶ He was born on January 12, 1863 in Calcutta.
- ▶ Narendranath acquired the name of Swami Vivekananda when he became a monk.
- ▶ Even when Narendra was young he questioned the validity of superstitious customs and discrimination based on caste and religion.

- ▶ After one year, he joined the Scottish Church College, Calcutta and studied philosophy.
- ▶ He studied western logic, western philosophy and history of European nations.
- ▶ As he advanced in his studies, his thinking faculty developed.
- ▶ Doubts regarding existence of God started to arise in Narendra's mind.
- ▶ This made him associate with the Brahmo Samaj, an important religious movement of the time
- ▶ Thus from childhood Narendra had the spirit of sacrifice and renunciation.
- ▶ Sri Ramakrishna as his guru and took training under him for five years in the Advaita Vedanta, the philosophy of non-dualism
- ▶ एकम् सत् विप्रा बहुधा वदन्ति ekam sat vipraa bahudhaa vadanti

- ▶ In 1890, Narendra set out on a long journey.
- ▶ He covered the length and breadth of the country.
- ▶ He visited Varanasi, Ayodhya, Agra, Vrindavan, Alwar etc.
- ▶ Narendra acquired the name of Swami Vivekananda during the journey.
- ▶ He came in close contact with the cultures of different regions of India and various classes of people in India.
- ▶ Vivekananda observed the imbalance in society and tyranny in the name of caste.
- ▶ He realised the need for a national rejuvenation(rewakening) if India was to survive at all.

- ▶ He meditated for three days and said later that he meditated about the past, present and future of India.
- ▶ In 1893, Swami Vivekananda went to America to attend the Conference of World Religions in Chicago.
- ▶ He earned wild applause for beginning his address with the famous words, "Sisters and brothers of America."
- ▶ Vivekananda mesmerized everyone in America with his masterful oratory.
- ▶ Wherever he went, he dwelt at length on the greatness of Indian Culture. He spoke with spontaneous ease on every topic, be it History, Sociology, Philosophy or Literature.

- ▶ He started disseminating the message of spiritual development among Indians.
- ▶ He realized that social service was possible only through the concerted efforts on an organized mission.
- ▶ To achieve this objective, Swami Vivekananda started Sri Ramakrishna Mission in 1897 and formulated its ideology and goal.
- ▶ During the next two years he bought a site at Belur on the banks of the Ganga, constructed the buildings and established the Ramakrishna Mutt.

➤ He was well versed in all the subjects. He showed great interest in the Vedas, Upanishads, Bhagavad Gita etc which related to the subjective reality. There was a proficient classical musician in Him and was also a great athlete.

# The First Visit To The West :-

- Swami Vivekananda's participation in '**The Parliament of World Religions**' in Chicago attracted worldwide acclamation where He represented India and Hinduism speaking on the **Advaitic principle of universality, emphasizing tolerance.(11 sept1893)**
- Soon the Swami was invited for many inspiring lectures in different parts of America where He stayed for 2 years.
- He also travelled to England twice.
- ▶ He founded 'Vedanta Society' of New York in 1894.
- ▶ Vivekananda composed "Khandana bhava- Bandhana" a prayer song dedicated to Ramakrishna in 1898.

# The Ideal And the nature of Universal Religion

- ▶ We counter different religion in the world , Every religion has its own creeds and beliefs.
- ▶ Sometime we find quarrels among different religion, where every religion claiming to be the only true religion and denying other religions to possess any element of truth.
- ▶ According to Vivekananda conflicts are only external. They do not effect the essence of religion. He upholds that different sects and dissimilarities in in religion must exist.
- ▶ Beauty lies in difference.
- ▶ Uniqueness and difference must be there in order that there exist beauty in coexistence.
- ▶ “It is the clash of thought, the differentiation of thought, that awakes thought ...whirls and eddied occure only in a rushing, living stream. There is no whirlpools in stagnant water”

- ▶ Variety brings challenged challenges bring growth , and where there is growth there is life.
- ▶ The conflict can only be resolved by means of a Universal Religion .

### According to Vivekananda a universal religion must follow some conditions

1. A universal religion must welcome all individual no matter what religion they are belong to . It must admit that nobody is born with a specific religion.
2. A Universal religion must be able to give satisfaction and comfort to every religious sects. The universal religion must be able to accommodate different religious sects along with their, unique doctrines.

Vivekananda believes that people mostly concentrate on external conflicts of different religions, therefore we fail to notice the existence of universal religion even if it is already there. Vivekananda strongly believes that Universal religion exist

# Vivekananda strongly believes in Universal Religion

- ▶ 1. Vivekananda is of the opinion that a close look on the aspects of different religions will show that there is no contradiction rather there is similarity among them. In reality, religions enhance with each other in various ways. It is our normal understanding that different religions concentrate only on their own doctrine and they find difficult to accept others' as true. But in reality, each religion takes up an aspect of religion and develops it. Since each religion is capable of generating something and developing in its own way, every religion is adding to the rich variety in the field of religions. Religions may give partial interpretations, but it is true. The fact lies in what Vivekananda says, "**man never progresses from error to truth, but, from truth to truth, from lesser truth to the highest truth.**" Therefore, there exists a kind of religion which holds that all religions have the *elements of truth*. This religion is the universal religion.
- ▶ 2. Vivekananda's another account of the existence of universal religion can be put as follows. Vivekananda says that there can be many ways of understanding the same thing. He explains his view with the example of taking photographs of an object from different angles. No two photographs of the same object will be alike if we take from different angles. Even if they are the photographs of the same object, they may even give opposite impressions. Likewise, we view truth in our own ways. We understand and grasp them in our own peculiar ways of understanding and grasping. This will make a difference between man and man, and this is the reason of the contradictory character of the different views. But the fact is that they are basically views of the same reality. They are just the different appearances because they are taken from different angles. **They are not to oppose each other, rather they are to enhance the knowledge about truth** in religion and this points towards the fact that the universal religion must exist.

- ▶ The nature of universal religion must be inclusive. It should not negate any religion as absurd. Universal religion must comprehend the common elements of all religions. Vivekananda is aware that religions have diverse elements on which they emphasize. For example, *Christianity lays emphasis on becoming pure to enter the kingdom of God while Islam emphasizes on brotherhood.* None of these elements be called absurd but meanwhile they cannot be called common elements. Universal religion must accommodate all the religions with respect without hurting the sentiments of the faithful. Vivekananda is aware that *variety must exist* and therefore he does not insist on oneness. By universal religion he does not mean a religion that will have one universal doctrine to be followed, or one universal faith and ritual. Religions may differ on various grounds and it is natural necessity to have such difference. A universal religion must accommodate all religions with all their differences.

- ▶ The universal religion teaches everyone to be kind hearted and to have respect for other religions. While speaking about universal religion, Vivekananda uses the word 'acceptance' which is the most important word that contains the meaning of universal religion according to Vivekananda. Acceptance is different from tolerance. Because tolerance has negative connotation which acceptance does not have. Tolerance implies an unwilling acceptance. Vivekananda recommends positive acceptance. This is the reason why he says that he can pray at any place- whether it is a Temple, or a Mosque, or a Church or any other place of worship.

# Those who believe in universal religion must abide by the following three things

- ❖ One should be broad-minded and open-hearted.
- ❖ One should be ready to learn from the scriptures of all religions.
- ❖ One's heart must be kept open for anything that may come in the future from different religions.

That common element to which all religions are ultimately drawn is God itself. Different things have common element that can bring them together. Man and woman are different, but as human beings they are alike. Likewise, men, animals and plants are all same as living beings, therefore they are one. This shows that even if different religions speak of different aspects of truth, as aspects of the same truth, they are all one and the same. According to Vivekananda, this truth is God itself. Although we belong to different religions, we are all one in God. Here the word 'God' is being used in its most comprehensive sense. This may be the personal God or the Absolute Being or whatever religions in the world consider as their ultimate end. All religions in the world teach to search for the ultimate Truth in order to be one with that. This is the ideal of universal religion.

# Some of the Characteristics of Universal Religion

- ❖ Being acceptable to people of all religions is another characteristic of universal religion. It has to show that it is the most suitable way to reach God and to share love with everyone.
- ❖ It should be away from any form of disrespect to any religion and it must be able to satisfy the minds of everyone.
- ❖ The universal religion must harmoniously balance all the aspects of f religion namely, philosophy, emotion, work, and mysticism.
- ❖ Those who follow universal religion must accept that every religion holds certain truth.
- ❖ God is the common element and it is the essence of universal religion.

# Some of the Characteristics of Universal Religion

- ▶ Universal religion aims at making people open hearted and broad minded.
- ▶ Universal religion must accommodate all religions with all their differences. 8. A universal religion must welcome all individuals no matter what religion they belong to.
- ▶ Universal religion must be able to give satisfaction and comfort to every religious sect.
- ▶ The universal religion has to supersede the conflicts of different sects.

Universal religion leads everyone towards the realization of ultimate union and it is acceptable to everyone as it respects all religions in the world. According to Vivekananda, Universal religion is attained by Yoga- union. Yoga has one ultimate goal- it is the realization of oneness or union, where multiplicity is superseded. This is clear in the words of Vivekananda- **"religion is realization, not talk, nor doctrine, nor theories...it is being and becoming, not hearing or acknowledging: it is the whole soul becoming changed into what it believes."**