CHAPTER- I

INTRODUCTION

A mighty tree produces a beautiful fruit. That fruit falls on the ground, it decays and rots, and out of that decay springs the root and the future tree, perhaps mightier than the first one. This period of decay through which we have passed was all the more necessary. Out of this decay is coming the India of the future; it is sprouting, its first leaves are already out; and a mighty, gigantic tree, the Urdhvamula, is here, already beginning to appear; and it is about that I am going to speak to you.

-Vivekananda

There is, in each human civilization, a harmonizing power of unity. From the Indian corner, this power has been understood to be ‘Dharma’ whereas it is Religion from the Western approach. Both ‘Dharma and Religion’ take a very significant role as the foundation of the wholeness of each civilization. Religion has been the direct experience of reality which is believed to have come from the apriori or aposterior theory of knowledge. Dharma too wants Eudaemonism or Perfectionism, i.e., the realization of the self or the infinite in mankind (Atmanam Viddhi). Dharma for man means to become the infinite that has been already in potency. The religious life, doctrines, creeds, and the like have been seen to have concern with religion in its primary stage. Of course, each and every empirical requirement and limitation are ultimately transcended. People possess
knowledge of the ‘Eternal Spirit’, understand in course of time that religion is not fanaticism. Religious things are too subtle and too complex to be expressed in logical propositions.

To revive and re-orient Hinduism from the grips of the privileged, few attempts were made by Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Debendranath Tagore, and many others. But their expositions on the Vedanta became imperfect to re-orient and re-establish the lost faith of religion for the ‘so-called educated persons in India’. The philosophy of Ramakrishna Paramahansa appeared in such a particular context to do the same. He, for the first time, demanded with certainty that religion is nothing but direct realization of the eternal ‘Truth’. “…..Thus, he became a living verification of the fact… new to the world….that all religions, if practised earnestly lead to the Godhead.”¹ This significant religious standpoint attracted the Hindu religion at its root that finally inspired Vivekananda (previously Naren) to follow his promised aim to realize God directly and this life itself. Vivekananda who interpreted that religion is possible merely in the supersensuous plane explained religion on a secured basis, i.e., universally accepted to all minds. He, in the similar voice of Rudolf Otto, made attempt to assure the religious believers of their beliefs and cautioned those who are disbelievers not to destroy but to assimilate, help and not to fight to evoke a consistent universal religion. Vivekananda wanted everyone to preach for universal humanity. To him, the Vedas are the exponent of the universal religion.

We cannot discuss Indian Philosophy and religion without the contributions made by Vivekananda to Indian Philosophy. Likewise, we cannot
think of Vivekananda without Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa, the spiritual guide of the former. For, the one was the spring and the other was the stream, conveying the spring’s waters.

God to Ramakrishna was a Fact and a Reality. He did not have to argue regarding God. He could affirm God. He was at the peak of Indian Spiritual Culture. His vision was cosmic in nature and character, and his realization was all-embracing. Vivekananda was his chief disciple, his right interpreter and his most efficient executive. Vivekananda did everything with aweful respect and due dedication.

Vivekananda was born in Calcutta on January 12 of 1863 on the holy day of Makara Sankranti. His father was Viswanath Datta, a prominent lawyer of Calcutta, and his mother was Bhubaneswari Devi, a very cultured woman. The Dattas named the child Narendranath and the mother believed that he had come to her in answer to her ardent prayers to Lord Siva. The child was the darling of everybody in and near home. As a boy he was highly soulful and deeply meditative, there were deeper powers in his young being than are usually found in youths. He was challenging and knew no fear. His excellent qualities and probabilities marked him out as a genious even at school and college.

Vivekananda was a thinker and the question of God troubled him. His intellect was so sharp that he could not take thing based on feeble faith and customary belief. He demanded verification, asked for proof, before he believed. The doubting youth went here and there in search of God for long but in vain.
And when he almost despaired of discovering God and almost conducted that God was a mad man’s idea, destiny took him to Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa. He asked the saint if he had seen God. Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa replied with a smile that not only had he seen God, but he could show God to him also. Thus in the simple temple-priest, the college-educated rationalist discovered his Sage and Saviour.

For nearly five years Vivekananda stayed with Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa and was taught and trained by him. At the end of this short period of the utmost intensity, Vivekananda had imbibed all the superman wisdom of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa and had become his alter ego.

Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa passed away in 1886, when Vivekananda was not even twenty three. On his very young shoulders fell the gigantic burden of executing Sri Ramakrishna’s mission. It was not an easy task, but if any one was capable of performing it was Vivekananda, who had the brain and the heart for it. He had already renounced home; he became Swami; he established a Math (a monastery) where he and his co-disciples could carry on austerities. He then wandered over India as a ‘parivrajaka sadhu’. From the northern Himalayan extremity to the southern land’s end did he travel, studying the Motherland, understanding her problems at first hand, and forming solutions for her regeneration. This pilgrimage was one of the landmarks of his life, and the very many occurrences and incidents relating to his wanderings are fascinating tasks into the rich variety and expressing his strong personality and extraordinary talents.
In 1893 Vivekananda went to America to attend the parliament of Religions to be held there at Chicago in September. He was not formally invited and enrolled as a delegate. With some difficulty he managed to get into the Parliament. When his turn to address the august assembly came, he rose like the morning sun, and spoke to the ‘Sisters and Brothers of America’. That heartly call fascinated the Parliament and the western world. Rising above stagnant creeds and narrow dogmas he spoke of harmony and universalism; his message came like the breath of life to a suffocated people. He stayed many months in America lecturing and teaching and helping Westerners to study Indian Philosophy. Then he went to England and Europe. He had become a bridge of understanding between the East and the West.

Vivekananda represented the Sanatana Dharma of India before the Parliament of religions, held in Chicago in 1893. He became successful in attracting the people of the western countries with the non-sectarian universal religion and philosophy of India and they cordially welcomed Vivekananda and became very eager to learn Indian religion and philosophy. He opined the Sanatana Dharma and its lofty ideas and universal ideal which later on won the hearts of the Western people.

In 1897 he returned to India. The nation rose like one man to honour him. The people saw in him a new Sankara who had risen to bring life and vigour to the motherland. Vivekananda reminded his countrymen of the Indian national ideal of renunciation, roused them to a sense of privilege in being Indians, and
showed them how spiritual culture was the secret of India’s immortal existence. He made ‘Bharat’ a ‘Prabuddha Bharat.’

But he did not stop with advising and preaching. He was a capable organizer and desired to set up an organization which could ensure the continuance of his Master’s mission. So he founded the Ramakrishna Math and Mission in Calcutta which is a body dedicated to self-realisation and to the service of humanity. The Sangha is his lasting legacy to mankind.

Vivekananda was not forty, when he entered into Mahasamadhi. But his age is not to be calculated in solar years. For, in just one decade of public work he had implanted into human consciousness, ideas which many need one thousand and five hundred years to get worked out in full. There is an Indian side to his life-work, and there is an international aspect to it. In both the fields his contribution has been unique.

Vivekananda, an extraordinary personality, dedicated his whole life towards real upliftment of humanity. In his dynamism of thought, humanism is the prime factor to be served. The central theme of his inspiring speeches for the whole world was man—his growth, development and fulfilment.

Vivekananda’s vision in his philosophy is integral in kind and quality. The main aim of his philosophy is to create a consciousness of world civilization, from the integration of all the essential insights now carried within the various cultures of the world. This philosophy is of immense significance today in creating global harmony.
Vivekananda’s life-long mission was to establish spiritual oneness of existence among mankind. He was a philosopher who felt, valued, acted and experienced life in every detail. His teachings are linked up with spiritual and physical experiences with their stress on cultivation of purity and strength. Vivekananda spoke of natural and harmonious development of the latent powers in man. His heartfelt call to the world was unmistakable and unambiguous. To him, the ideal of all education and training should be this man-making and to make the man grow. He had all appreciation for the industrial progress of the West, yet there was something more in his philosophy. According to him, the same divinity exists behind each and everything. He said a man of reason and intellect can have the best of wealth and power, still he may not find peace of mind unless he discovers his divine existence. This evolution of the individual into whole man is what the Vedanta calls the spiritual growth of man. Vivekananda, the illustrious apostle of Sri Ramakrishna, reiterated this divine message of his master over and above the socio-political development of the West.

Vivekananda rejected both emotionalism and mysticism. He was out and out a rationalist. He was highly attracted by the character of Keshab Chandra Sen, the eminent leader of the Brahmosamaj. He identified himself with it for the time being. But this kind of life; lack of spiritual depth could not hold him fast for long to that institution. He came away and began to approach the leaders of different religious orders with the question “Have you ever seen God”? but got
no satisfactory answer. At last Sri Ramakrishna satisfied him by giving straight cut reply that there are many stars in the sky at night but not when the Sun rises. One cannot, therefore, say that there are no stars in the sky during the day. Man cannot find God in the days of ignorance that does not mean that there is no God. He was very much impressed by the manner of life Sri Ramakrishna used to live. He found in him a master who approved doubts and did not accept unquestioned obedience. This characteristic of his master impressed Vivekananda enormously. Furthermore, his master’s message to see the truth from all angles and through all perspectives developed in Vivekananda an independence of thought leading to self-reliance and regard for truth. It has been said that Vivekananda is a commentator on Sri Ramakrishna. But he with giant intellect and deep understanding made a distinctive contribution that his commentary became itself a philosophy. Vivekananda fully realized that in order to become a universal religion the teaching of Vedanta must be made intensely practical. Holiness, purity and charity are not the exclusive possession of any Church in the world. The solutions of all problems, national and international, lie in the awakening of each soul to realize the divinity within. It was his firm conviction that the ancient heritage of India could alone supplement the world civilization. He reminded Indians of that heritage of which they were the custodians. Vivekananda realized that in India’s ideal of devotion, renunciation, knowledge and realization one found human culture that formed the foundation of an enduring civilization. Here his universal as well as synthetic trend of mind has been revealed. Vivekananda
was, in real sense of the term, a world- spiritual teacher. All his works were to remind men and women towards their spiritual heritage. He was capable of developing a comprehensive spirituality out of the Vedantic ideal. This is really unique and uncompromising task.

Vivekananda’s philosophy of culture and nationalism represents a synthesis between the past and the present as also between the East and the West. As a universal teacher of humanity, Vivekananda keenly felt the problem of both the East and the West. As such, solution laid down by him was both national and international. He could develop science with religion in his vision of life.

Vivekananda was proud of India’s glorious past, again he was sure of India’s bright future, but the present condition of India made him miserable. His compassionate heart bled for the Indian people. He exhorted his countrymen to stir themselves for the task of removing poverty, spreading education and nullifying social injustices. He prescribed religion of Vedanta for India and here the patriot in Vivekananda came out more clear than the monk in him. In a remarkable letter written from Chicago in 1894 to the Maharaja of Mysore, Vivekananda makes the following appeal, “The one thing that’s at the root of all evils in India is the condition of the poor. The poor in the West are devils, compared to them ours are angles and it is, therefore, so much the easier to raise our poor, the only service to be done for our lower classes is to give them education, to develop their lost individuality”2. Unlike Raja Ram Mohan Roy, who wanted cultural revivalism by making external reform from outside,
Vivekananda wanted internal change from within one’s own nature. In a word, Vivekananda thought of his countrymen to have unlimited strength and faith in themselves.

Vivekananda possessed a clear idea of what was ahead for the world and therefore his thoughts and feelings were in terms of the problems which we are facing today and which we will face tomorrow. He like his master advocates the path of spirituality in the material and social upliftment of the masses. He was a passionate advocate of the religious theory of nationalism, since India is a land of religion. He suggested that the masses must be made conscious of their spirituality through a good system of education. Vivekananda was not an educationist in the real sense of the term, yet education as a national problem engaged his thought. As highlighted by that, education is nothing but the manifestation of perfection already existed in man. And religion may be said as the innermost core of that education.

To Vivekananda, true religion is realization of divinity within and this has to be awakened through education of spirit. His main problem in life was the social and cultural emancipation of India. He preached the gospel of self-realisation through selfless service and hence there was an element of spiritualism in all his educational ideas. In every sphere of life in India, moral and religious trend of living should get the highest importance. Vivekananda said that we should want man-making religion and man-making education. This very fact Vivekananda realized long ago by his deep insight into the religion of
Vedanta. He emphasized that there must be a new religious programme for the whole of India which must lay emphasis on the oneness of God, the freedom of man as well as the equality of men and women. Vivekananda never advocated narrow nationalism rather he embraced all the nations, great or small. He has a catholic and tolerant mind to discover fundamental unity behind all the nations of the world.

Vivekananda believed that the only condition of national life is the conquest of the world by spiritual thought. Here his approach is universal. For knowledge of divinity is secret of man’s development both in individual and collective life, secular as well as spiritual. It finds expression in two ways- ‘I am divine and Thou art divine’. As man becomes aware of his own divinity he, at the same time, becomes aware of the divinity of his fellow-beings. And here lies, the everlasting relevance of Vivekananda’s philosophy of education for the future world. Indeed, Vivekananda was an apostle of national unity and communal harmony. His passionate call for general fraternity and unity of India’s people and the abolition of religious and communal discord and of caste prejudices was combined with an appeal for peace and friendship among all nations of the world. This is the corner stone of India’s traditional education and India’s national character. That’s the reason why we pay the highest tribute to Vivekananda as one of the initiators in India of the most important movement of our time, the peace movement. In his eyes there was no Hindu or Muslim, Brahmin or untouchable, rich or poor. He saw the divine in all men and he got no difference between the service of God and the service of man.
A remarkable movement was started in the Vivekananda era by Swami Dayananda Saraswati who founded the Arya Samaj in 1895. It was a reforming movement. Both Dayananda Saraswati and Vivekananda were sannyasins and obtained their strength through renunciation and service of the highest order. But unlike Dayananda Saraswati, Vivekananda had a universal outlook.

In his philosophy, Vivekananda introduced scientific method of ‘Integral Yoga’ as the way of perfection. The religion of Yoga unites finite with the infinite, thereby the realization of one’s own nature can be best revealed. “The one ground that we have”, he said “is our sacred tradition, our religion and upon that we shall have to build”.

Vivekananda with this practical application of religion of the Vedanta wanted his countrymen to be strong and bold, independent and proud. He took Vedanta as a reforming tool of the common people. He believed in supremacy of spiritualism over the materialistic view of life. The whole world requires light and India alone has that light not in magic but in the teaching of Advaita Vedanta. Vivekananda preached that the aim of the Advaita Vedanta is to lead man to the highest truth. Man is rooted in the spirit; man is divine; Atman is Brahman- there is the sum and substance of its teachings. This metaphysical foundation of divinity behind humanity will enable people all over the world to resolve all their problems – political, economic, social, spiritual etc.

To Vivekananda, true religion is privilege-breaking and not privilege-making as has been said by Karl Marx. His historical studies have led him to
believe that almost all the great religious teachers tried to put down the barrier of religions. Religions cannot be detected in sects and society. Religion does not exist in temples or buildings, churches or attending public worship. It is found not in books or in words, or in lectures or in organization. Religion consists in realization. To Vivekananda, religion is not scripture-bound nor lecture-bound. It stands for spiritual revelation and not mere creeds and rituals. Religion is nothing but the manifestation of the Divinity in man. Thus when Karl Marx regards religion ‘as the opium of the people’, Vivekananda subscribes to it for he also does not believe in the so-called institutionalized religion.

Vivekananda accepts the psychology of the Sankhyas who set out enumerating the elements of the universe, and concluded that there are two elements, *Purusha* and *Prakriti*, the Sentient and the Insentient, the Live and Non-live parts of the universe. He pays a warm tribute to Kapila, the propagator of the Sankhya theory. He expounds how, as the Sankhyas say, every bit of knowledge is a compound, that is, a mixed entity. When one says that he knows a blackboard, what he really knows is the reaction of his mind to the so-called blackboard. The blackboard itself is unknown, one can never know it. It is what the German philosophers call the ‘thing-in-itself.’ The blackboard that ‘X’ is acting on his mind and the mind reacts. The mind is like a lake. If one throws a stone upon a lake as soon as the stone strikes it, a reactionary wave comes towards the stone. This wave is what one really sees. And this wave is not like the stone at all… ‘X’ plus mind is one external universe. All knowledge is by
reaction. When that knowledge Absolute becomes limited we call it intuition, when it becomes still more limited we call it reason, instinct, etc. This knowledge Absolute may be imagined to have two counterparts, Existence Absolute and Bliss Absolute. These three are but three names given to the same entity to cover the three fundamental urges of man, to exist, to think, to feel, Bliss Absolute, when it becomes limited, we call love, attraction for bodies or for ideas. Existence Absolute becomes limited and manifests as plant life, animal life, human life just as infinite space is apparently limited by the walls of a room.

The underlying unity of existence is the main motive of human activity. Man is inevitably and constantly moving towards Advaita, knowingly or unknowingly. Modern scientific progress unmistakably demonstrates this, and Vivekananda excessively draws importance of Advaita to modern scientific progress. “All things sentient and insentient, are rushing helter-skelter towards unity”, he told Haripada Mitra in 1892.

Whatever we see is subject to change. The greatest and apparently unmoving mountains undergo changes. Creation takes place anew every instant. It is ceaseless action and the will to strive, the outpouring of a spring, never a stagnant pond where there is a lump of earth today, tomorrow there will be a pond. A heart with anger today may be seen bubbling with love at a future moment. In turn every entity in the universe partakes of the essence of every other entity. Attributes and objects which are interchangeable must be essentially the same. This appearing multiplicity, therefore, is only the outward form of an abiding unity which is unchangeable.
The unlimited nature of the one is discussed by Vivekananda by taking simple illustrations. Everything which we know in this universe is limited; and whatever limits something else must itself be limited by something. If we think of space we have to think of it as a little circle, we cannot imagine a limited space without contrasting it with unlimited space. The finite can be perceived only on the background of the infinite; and this infinite provides the contrast to everything finite. This infinite is the Self or Brahman. Such infinite there can be only one. Suppose there are two infinites, A and B; the infinite A limits the infinite B, because B is not A, and A is not B. So either A can be infinite or B can be infinite, but not both in any case. Thus the infinite Brahman can be only one.

The synthesis gained and preached by Vivekananda of the various schools of Vedanta is really wonderful. It is common knowledge that the Upanisads contain passages propagating all sorts of opinions on relations of God with man and with the universe. These opinions are often contradictory to each other. Each of the main systems of Vedanta, viz. Visishtadvaita (qualified non-dualism), Dvaita (dualism) and Advaita (non-dualism) derives its authority mainly from the Upanishads and perhaps would have liked the Upanisads to preach its standpoint to the exclusion of the others. But that is not the case. The Upanishads propagate all the three viewpoints in different places and contexts, and it is a hard job for each of these schools to account for the presence of the other views in the Upanishads. Vivekananda studied the Upanisads independently and came to the conclusion that the apparent contradictions in the Upanishads pointed to one
underlying system making them a harmonious whole. He brought to this thought a discovery. He writes in 1895 to the organizers of ‘Brahmavadin’, a magazine proposed to be started in Madras, “Now I will tell you my discovery. All of religion is contained in the Vedanta, that is in the three stages of the Vedanta philosophy, Dvaita, Visishtadvaita and Advaita; one comes after the other. These are the three stages of spiritual growth in man. Every one is necessary. This is the essential of religion. The Vedanta applied to the various ethnic customs and creeds of India is Hinduism. The first stage, Dvaita, applied to the ideas of the ethnic groups of Europe is Christianity, as applied to the semitic groups, it is Islam, the Advaita as applied in its Yoga perception form is Buddhism. Now, by religion is meant the Vedanta; the application must vary according to the different needs, surroundings and other circumstances of different nations. You will find that philosophy is the same, the Saktas, the Saivas and others apply it, each to their own special cult and forms”

The dictum “Unity in diversity” is equally important. The basic unity of all existence is as significant as the apparent diversity through which it manifests itself. Vivekananda generated a burning passion for work and developing one’s individuality with a quiet resignation into the Infinite Lord. On occasions when men seemed to be drifting away from the awareness of the all-pervading God, he was quick to remind them.

During his stay in the West, Vivekananda has to fight with several objections to Advaita, the commonest of them being that in Advaita man’s individuality would be lost. In the questions which usually followed a talk on
Advaita philosophy, the Westerners asked Vivekananda regarding individuality after realization of one’s oneness with God. That is to say, they were in position to clarify that in such a practice one’s individuality would fully be lost. In response to their query, Vivekananda gently told them that people of United States of America were very much afraid of losing their individualities. He opined that when people would know God they would rather remain purely individual. Because one would attain one’s true individuality after realization of one’s own nature and not before. In knowing God, one’s individuality would not be lost, rather would be sustained everything fruitful. In such a way, Vivekananda became successful in convincing the people of USA about the big message of Naranarayan.

The concept of a personal God like Krishna, Siva and Kali was contrary to the western mind. The rationalist became afraid of the apparent contribution involved in advocating Advaita on one hand and worshipping a family God like Vishnu with all format. Really there is nothing more surprising in worshipping an image of God than in accepting a piece of paper as money. It is symbolism, pure and simple, and symbols run this world of Maya. The thorn of Maya has to be extracted by means of another thorn of a personal God, and then both are to be thrown away. Explaining this symbolism, Vivekananda said, “The totality of all souls not the human alone is the personal God. The will of the totality nothing can resist. It’s what we know as Law. And that’s what we mean by Siva, Kali and so on”.5
On the other hand, there were thinkers who were just waiting for Vivekananda to sound the great clarion call of Advaita, they found it but an echo of the bell ringing in their hearts since long. This psychological previous thought made them instinctive followers of Advaita. Vivekananda has, thus, carved a place for himself as the modern apostle of Advaita, of cosmic unity. His words have become the modern hymn of Advaita.

The great ideal of a Universal Religion was explained by Vivekananda as early as 1893 on the floor of the Parliament of Religions. He boldly put Advaita, the unity of all existence, as the possible basis of a Universal Religion. He recalled his Master’s words, ‘A river has no need of barriers. If it dams itself up it stagnates and becomes foul’. Advaita does not recognize any regional or racial or national boundaries. It accepts everything that exists, discards nothing, and transcends all types of conflicts.

Indeed no real religion can be anything short of a universal appeal. For one thing, if one stops considering personalities and sticks to principles, every religion would lead to universal love. Secondly, human nature must be made broad enough; otherwise sectarianism with narrow thought will always be available. Those who preach love for humanity practise sectarian love and those who love their sects more than religion end by loving themselves more than their sects. With a deep insight into the human nature, seers like Buddha and Christ have avoided empty discussion and pinned down essential religion to giving up selfish desires and practising love for humanity. It is indeed surprising that
sympathies of educated, well-meaning men are often narrow. Here, it is interesting to refer to over the door of Shantiniketan, the home of the Tagores, an inscription runs, “In this place no image is to be adored”. But it goes to add, ‘And no man’s faith is to be despised’. This approach appears to stop at tolerance, but is short of acceptance. The Advaita would respect even this attitude, and await its further broadening.

Vivekananda was greatly prepared for the task of preaching the gospel of a Universal Religion. His profound love for humanity was simply boundless. He connected different religions of different lands to different social customs prevailing in them. The needs of different souls are different depending on the individual desires and circumstances. The difficulty arises when one demands that other think like himself. Vivekananda was convinced that no one rule can equally be applied to people of this world in any field whatsoever. He cited several instances bringing out the truth of this conviction to which lip-service has been paid by many, but the awareness of which is in most of these only so ordinary. He called upon man to imbibe not selfishness rather love for humanity, generosity etc.

By the term religion, Vivekananda did not mean the creeds or rituals but the fundamentals of Hindu religion. To him, religion was neither word nor doctrine; it was realization.

Universal religion is the most general concept that asserts the oneness of religion for all men. Explaining Universal religion, Sri Ramakrishna said that the
religions of the world are not contradictory or antagonistic. They are various phases of the one Eternal Religion. For M.K. Gandhi, “It’s not Hinduism which I certainly prize above another religion, but the religion that transcends Hinduism which changes one’s very nature, binds one indissolubly to the truth within and ever purifies”. Sri Ramakrishna once stated that there never was my religion or yours, my national or your national religion. There never existed many religions, there is only the one. One infinite religion exists and this religion is expressing itself on various countries, in various ways. We, therefore, must respect all religions, and we must try to accept them all as far as we can.

Vivekananda’s concept of universal religion may be said to be rooted in his Master Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa. Universality in religion admits that the religious mind has nothing to fear from truth, for truth is the warp and woof of religion. The words ‘true religion’ are not used here in the sense my religion is true, or your religion is false. That is altogether a wrong concept of religion. As Sri Ramakrishna said; ‘Every religion is true’. Some people honestly doubt how, if Christianity is true, Hinduism can also be true. They think that if their religion is true, others’ religions must be false, because their religion differs from others. There is a very childish and naive idea about religion. Just as the truth of my existence does not negate the truth of other’s existence, in the same manner, the fact of my religion being true does not negate the fact of other’s religion also being true at the same time. That is not, however, to say that all religions are identical, but all the religions are true. As for example, one may take pictures of
Himalayas from the side of India, Tibet or China. None of the pictures will be identical with the others. But all of them will surely be true pictures of the Himalayas. Likewise, all religions of the world are but pictures of the same truth….

Conclusion

Roughly speaking, the great religions of the world have been classified from three sources, viz., the Indian group- Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism, the Western group- Zoroastrianism, Judaism, Christianity and Islam, the Shiro-Japanese group- Taoism, Confucianism and Shintoism.

Explaining the universal character of religion, Vivekananda said, “Each soul is potentially divine. The goal is to manifest this divine within by controlling nature, external and internal. Do this either by work or worship or psychic control, or philosophy-by one or more, or all of these- and be free”. This is, according to Vivekananda, the whole of religion. Doctrines or dogmas, or rituals or books, or temples or forms, are but secondary details. Universal religion teaches a religion of humanity, based entirely upon ethical laws. It is a religion of self-conquest and of the victory of righteousness over unrighteousness through own ways or style of thinking, willing and feeling irrespective of caste, creed and religion.

The establishment of the ‘attractive principles’ of ‘Religion’, is the central issue of endeavour for Vivekananda, the illustrious Indian sannyasin. It is the
Vedantic philosophical tradition that has inspired him though he has adopted his own way of analyzing religion.

A very remarkable element in Vivekananda’s philosophy of religion is his belief in the unity of existence and the essential unity of all religions. Each religion, according to Vivekananda, is as one pearl on a string of pearls. As they complement each other so in the heart of everything the same truth prevails. Vivekananda points out that we have to recognize unity by our very nature through variations. Truth may be expressed in a hundred thousand ways. But each of these ways is true as far as it goes. Religion, therefore, is a complex phenomenon if we consider the literal meaning of the term ‘Religion’. It is the most comprehensive whole of human existence. Prof. G. Watts Cunningham is in agreement to this view. He observes that mankind is incurably religious because man commonly has his religious beliefs and practices at every level of civilization.

Vivekananda like many Indian thinkers has never tried to separate religion from philosophy. Hinduism and Hindu religion are interviewed with each other like two sides of the same coin. Religion for Vivekananda is Vedanta. In a letter Vivekananda once clarifies with certainty that worldliness and realization of God cannot go together. In India, the attempt has been made to reach a science of religion and philosophy. The Hindus do not separate these as is customary in western countries. It is always grounded in reason and scientific truth. Vedanta religion is known as Hinduism. Religion is that science which seeks to see the
Reality behind things and their constitutions. The only difference is that every science is mainly ‘objective’ while religion represents the total ‘subjective science’.

Vivekananda opines that real religion, rises above mythology. It can never rest upon that. Modern science has really made the foundations of religion strong. It is scientifically demonstrable that the whole universe is one. What the metaphysicians call ‘being’, the physicists call ‘matter’. There is no real fight between the two. Vedanta and modern science both posit a self-evolving cause. In itself are all the causes. This view of Vivekananda is akin to Dr. S. Radhakrishnan. To Radhakrishnan also the spirit of science leads to the refinement of religion. Religion is not magic or witchcraft, quackery or superstition. It is not to be confused with dogmas and incredible superstition.

Vivekananda has a catholic and tolerant mind to discover the fundamental unity behind all the religions of the world. He considers that the possibility of religious harmony depends on the definition of religion itself. When man’s ideal of religion becomes broad and deep then only it can embrace every variety of religious forms and practices. Such a broad religion can satisfy every level of human possibilities. This spiritual renaissance of India encouraged him to cultivate the past with present and traditionalism with modernism. Since every individual is unique in his own possibilities, so a practical generalization becomes impossible.

Vivekananda as an essentialist, holds that religion is essentially one but diverses are its manifestations. Diverse manifestations of this essence must be
encouraged to multiply. Every religion is the expression of ‘Truth’. Truth stands on its own evidence. It does not require any other testimony to prove its truth. It is self-effulgent. It penetrates into the innermost of our nature and says, “This truth”. For the progress of the society, variety on every plane is appreciable. So for better functioning of the ‘World of Religions’, we must look for opportunities suit us the best. Vedanta proclaims and wants to present before the world different methods through which every man can work. The Vedanta thus says, “Let each person in the world be separate, if you will; the one principle, the unity will be behind. The more prophets there are, the more books, the more seers, the more methods, so much the better for the world.”

This is the practical side of all religions. The plan of Vedanta, is first to lay down the principles, map out for us the goal and then to teach us the method by which to arrive at the goal, to understand and realize religion. Hence the need for ‘tolerance’ and the value of ‘comparison’ have to be cultivated. This attitude of comparison will ultimately deter us from finding out the defects in religions other than our own. In amplifying this idea, Vivekananda opines: “We Hindus do not merely tolerate, we unite ourselves with every religion,… So we gather all these flowers, and binding them together with the cord of love, make them into a wonderful bouquet of worship”. Thus all throughout his life, he tried to show to the world that Vedanta Religion is a symposium of all faiths of the world. Therefore, the whole of the Vedanta religion must be conquered by spiritual thoughts for a developed realization of what is the essential unity of all religions of the world.
References

1. M.L. Burke : Swami Vivekananda In the West Prollogue, p. 5
6. Gandhi, M.K.; Young India, 12-05-'20

***