Chapter - 5

CONCLUSION

Maulana Abul Kalam Azad and Swami Vivekananda were the two outstanding exponents of universal religion and religious pluralism in twentieth century India. They fought relentlessly against backwardness, narrow-mindedness, superstitions and religious fanaticism in their respective religions and paved the way for a modern approach to religion. They stood for inter-religious brotherhood, pluralism, and tolerance. The significance of their catholic vision and mission can hardly be over-emphasised in the contemporary world. The history of modern Indian thought cannot be complete without an adequate reference to these two outstanding figures. They are the outshining examples of both religious catholicity and political sagacity in modern Indian thought.

Universal religion, according to them, provides a common platform for all religions. They stress upon the essential unity of all great world religions. Universal religion gives respect to all religions without deviating from one's own religion. They believe that all the spiritual pathways lead to the one and same goal. There is no conflict or incompatibility between universal religion and different historical religions, for it is the common universal essence of them all.

For Vivekavanda, religion in essence is man's way of living in the name of truth. He was a strong follower of Hinduism. But it does not mean
he thought that Hinduism is superior to all other religions. He used the term Hinduism in a very broad sense. He does not mean by it the creed or rituals but the fundamentals of Hinduism. He says that Hinduism as religion is neither creed nor doctrine. It is only the realization - the realization of truth.

He argues that every recognized religion of the world has its own philosophy, which is unique to itself and which enables it to differentiate itself from the other religions. But the question is if each religion differs from the others at its most basic philosophical level, how can it be possible to have one universal philosophy? Moreover, it is also observed that each one claims its superiority on others in a very rigid manner. Sometimes the people say those who do not follow my religion, they cannot attain salvation. They must go in hell because only my way is the true and right one.

Now, if the conflict of religions arises on account of the fact that different religions have different philosophy, mythology and rituals, the religious harmony can be attained only by having a universal religion that rises above these differences.

Vivekananda is aware that it is a difficult task because different religions gave emphasis on different qualities of religion. So it is much difficult to find the common elements. For example, Islam gave emphasis on universal brotherhood, Hinduism on spirituality, Christianity on self-purification. It is difficult to compare these several elements of religions. Thus, it is difficult to find any universal elements in respect to religion but
we also knew it that they exist. If we explore we will find it within the differences but then our approach has to be not that of exclusion but inclusion. We must seek unity within the diversity.

We must first of all know that we all are human beings and that we are not equal. We are not equal in our physical strength because one man is stronger than other, some have more power and some have less power and some are men and some women. There are many differences between us. But along with these differences we have one element which is common in all of us. We all are human beings and belong to one humanity. Vivekananda says that the universal element that runs through all the various religions of the world, which can be said as common to all religions is in a general way the faith in God.

Vivekananda asserts that unity in diversity is the scheme of universe. Two different things are apparently different, but may be similar in a particular sense. Men and women are different with each other but as a human being they are same. As living beings men, animals and plants are all one. In this manner different religions talk of different aspects of the same truth. They all are talking about the same God. In Him we are all one. God is the only one ultimate reality of this universe. Every religion, consciously or unconsciously, is struggling towards the realization of this unity that is God.

Religion, as Azad believes it, is a great motivational force. He says that Qur’an emphasised that all human beings are equal in the eyes of God, because this human form is given to all by God. This is the true element
which firmly joins us in a community. But, because of ignorance, people divided themselves in the name of race, community, customs, nation, religion, culture etc. On such bases human beings distanced and kept themselves isolated from each other. In this situation, except God there is nothing which can bring all human beings together again and remove ignorance and discrimination.

The greatest feature of Islam is that it does not consist in any special structure of Shariah but in its proclamation of the fundamental truth that God is one, and mankind is one community. The Qur’an accepts all the scriptures. It specifically instructs its believers not to make any distinction between various prophets. This religious pluralism is, in fact, a revolutionary breakthrough in the annals of human history.

According to Azad, one of the central purposes of the Qur’an is to restore the Abrahamic vision. On the basis of this vision, the Qur’an wants to unite the people of the book and by implication the entire mankind. The basic purpose of religion is spiritual transformation of man. What is called Shari’ah or law is instrumentally important for accomplishing such a spiritual transformation. For Azad, Shari’ah or law is significant in its own way. However, the eternal and universal vision of religion or Din has priority over legal injunctions or practices of worship and rituals etc.

According to Azad, it is clear that the distinctions among humans are man-made. In the eyes of God all human beings are one regardless of their community or nation. If all human beings resolve their internal differences
and serve the God, all differences will be banished. We all will feel that entire world is our home and entire humanity is same. Once the hearts are united the existence of differences will completely vanish from this world.

Azad says that Qur'an does not follow any sectarianism in religion. It always opposes the prejudices of groups. It always tried to bring all mankind in one way of life, the way to God or the way of truth. *Din* of God is not new invention. *Din* existed throughout the time. The way to God is that to which all prophets invited all human beings. Azad says that religion has been one and same everywhere. The message of all prophets was same. They preached belief in one supreme God and advised human beings to live righteously. The prophets of all times have emphasized oneness of God. Islam does not favour any exclusive group of religion. On the other hand, it asserts that it has come to put an end to all groupism and bring all mankind to one path of life, the path of truth - the path to which all prophets have invited mankind.

Azad says that Qur'an disapproves of the tendency of regarding one prophet as superior to other, or accepting one prophet and rejecting another. He says that Qur'an is the message of God to men through the prophets who appeared from time to time. So no one is superior over other.

According to Azad, Islam proclaimed the unity of all religions. He further says that the difference in legal codes, ceremonials, rituals, practices and the form of worship observed in different religions should not make us oblivious to the unity of all religions. The difference of legal norms, rituals,
practices and the form of worship do not eliminate their essential oneness. Various religions differ in methods, norms and criteria. These differences are not difference in Din. It addresses the entire humanity. It is not for any one particular race or community but for all.

Azad emphasizes that the religion revealed by God was but one for all mankind, and that therefore every deviation from this was a clear aberration. According to him, the basic teaching of the Qur'an is that Islam or Al-Deen-al Islam is the name of that fundamental spirit of religion which had gradually been engulfed by forces of history and where reality had been dimmed in the mist of human superstition and man’s habit of myth making.

For Vivekananda, too, universal religion stresses the nonsectarian and non-discriminating spiritual values common to the great religions of the world. It goes to the common roots of all religions. It seeks to appreciate their common denominator. It cautions against the common enemy of man’s peace, prosperity and progress. It identifies the common dangers and roadblocks that obstruct the spiritual path of all mankind.

Furthermore, the non-discriminating outlook of universal religion is all-pervasive. In refusing to discriminate between man and man, it not only transcends sectarian and theological differences, it also pulls down the barriers between the religious and the nonreligious. It seeks to bridge the gulf that separates theists and atheists, gnostics and agnostics, skeptics and mystics. It affirms that the fundamental spiritual potentiality is same in all human beings, regardless of their superficial beliefs and tenets. Beliefs and
tenets are, in ultimate analysis, mental formations, determined by the accidental circumstances of history. So they reflect neither the deepest essence of man's being, nor the essential structure of the Supreme. They are practically useful and pragmatically valid tools of man's self-adjustment to the changing environment. In his inmost essence, the individual human is a spiritual entity, a center of creative freedom. He is neither a mere creature of circumstances, nor a plaything of random forces. His essence lies much deeper than ideas, dogmas and creeds. It is the abiding spirit in him that ultimately counts.

Vivekananda, too, believes that such a religion already exists but we have lost it because of external divergences of religion. These external conflicts affect the essence of religion. Behind the external differences there is essential sameness. Thus though universal religion already exists such as universal brotherhood existed in man, people fail to notice its presence in their lives. Those who really feel the universal brotherhood, they don't try to make sects for it but they try to spread out it in whole world. They have sympathy and love for all mankind.

The idea of a universal religion does not mean that one doctrine should be followed by all mankind. It is impossible. There will not be one universal mythology or one set of rituals accepted by all religious. There can never be a time when all will accept the same thought. If ever it happens that would mean the world is not progressing. Sameness and perfect balance will create an unmoving world. Because diversity is the first principle of
progressive life. If we all think same thought it would be dangerous for the world. So the differences of thought must remain, otherwise soul of our progress or the soul of our thought will cease. But as we recognized the necessity of variation for the progress of world, we also recognized unity in nature. We must recognize variation because only through this variation we can learn about something from different points and that this thing while being different from different points of view is nevertheless one and same.

Vivekananda believed in the diversity and plurality of religions. But yet, on the other hand, he places at the top the Vedantic Hinduism in its advaita form. He argues that Vedanta alone can be the universal religion because it alone is based on universal principles while other religions are based on the religious experience of their founder and confined to time and places. All people of the world can come together only through principles not through persons.

Azad also says that the Qur’an cites the identification of one scripture with another scripture. It says that the teaching of one prophet confirms the teaching of other. One scripture does not deny other.

On the other hand, Vivekananda holds that there can not be one universal rituals. He says that Veda is the source of all knowledge. All that is called knowledge is in the Vedas. Every word is sacred and eternal... without beginning and without end. The Vedas were the first to find and proclaim the way of Moksha. All means are not good but the right and correct means is that of the Vedas. The means adopted by Buddhist is not
right because they do not accept the Vedas, whatever the great teachers like Buddha, Christ and others taught they took it from Vedas.

Vivekananda was saying that all the doctrines and practices of any religion that do not agree with Vedantic Hinduism are to be rejected.

But the Qur'an asserts that there is no revealed scripture which does not lay stress on the need to follow the way of God. The Qur'an calls upon every one to show whether the messages delivered before of the Qur'an differed in any manner from the message it delivered. Qur'an says that the teaching of one religion endorses the teaching of other. One does not deny the other. In all of them there are several teachings which are common and which serve as a point around which everything resolves. For when one and same idea is stated and emphasized at different times and places, the natural conclusion that forces itself for attention is that there is something real and abiding about it.

So Islam never rejects the authority of other scripture. This is the reason why the Qur'an refers to the message and commandments of the scriptures delivered before it. It bears to the similarity and oneness of their teaching.

But in regard to religion and scripture Vivekananda wants to establish the superiority and absoluteness not only of the Vedanta but of advaitic Hinduism.

Azad holds that when Qur'an was delivered, the followers of the prevailing religion took the outward forms of religion and gave whole
emphasis on rituals but the rituals are not the religion. Ritual is outward aspect of religion. The spirit was something superior to it, and that alone was Din or religion. Din in reality was devotion to God through righteous living. It was not an exclusive heritage of any single group of people. On the other hand, it was common heritage of all mankind.

That is why the Qur’an lays such great stress on the need for tolerance. In this manner, Islam has universal approach towards every religion giving equal status to all.

Salvation, is common concept for both Vivekananda and Azad’s approaches to universal religion. Azad holds that Qur’an makes it clear that a man can attain salvation through righteous living. Salvation cannot be attained by performing ceremonies or rituals. There is only one way to purify the self and that is by the true worship and doing good action. He says salvation is not fixed for any religious group or community. The truth is that God opened the door of salvation for every human being.

According to Vivekananda, too, Moksa has been declared to be the goal of life. It literally means deliverance. Thus it delivers from all types of pain, worldly as well as other worldly. In other words, Vivekananda said that liberation can be best defined as freedom and freedom is linked with equanimity.

Vivekananda said that liberation can be achieved by all the three paths namely, Jnana yoga, Karma yoga and Bhakti yoga. In his own view, however, Karma yoga was the best way to realize liberation.
But although Azad and Vivekananda both accept the salvation for all human being there is the difference that in Islam there is only one way to achieve salvation that is through worship of God and righteous living. Vivekananda shows three paths for salvation.

Both Vivekananda and Azad said universalism and humanism are not in conflict with nationalism. Vivekananda emphasised the foundation of spiritual nationalism in India. He wanted the reawakening of self-pride and self-confidence in each and every Indian. His approach to nationalism was indigenous, spiritual and humanistic. He made inward inspection. He gave a positive approach to the Indian nationalism.

Vivekananda said that religion is the soul of Indian nationalism. He said that the people in India pay more attention to religious freedom and give less importance to political and economical independence. This is because of the fact that religion is more important to them than politics.

Vivekananda was an ardent patriot but also a true internationalist. He never confined himself in the four walls of country. His love for humanity knew no geographical boundaries. He denounced exclusiveness and recommended the exchange of thought and inter-communication between India and all nations of the world. He gave emphasis on the harmony and good relationship among all nations. Vivekananda said that unity in variety is the plan of the universe. We are all a part of the humanity but as individuals we are distinct from each other.
As a man one is separate from the woman but as a human being a man is one with woman. So all tribes, nations, races have distinct identities but all are part of the world. He was a true believer of world unity. Unity is knowledge and diversity is ignorance.

Universal brotherhood of man is the very important element of his nationalism. He believed in equality and mutual cooperation among the nations. Universal brotherhood can establish itself only through religious harmony and cultural exchange. He says that the rich nations should help poor nations. Then the international friendly relation would be a reality because day by day different religious sect are creating conflict and destroying the feeling of brotherhood.

Vivekananda believed in the equality among all nations. He opposed the British rule in India. Because all nations are equal, nobody is superior to another. No nation has right to rule others. He never favoured war and conquest.

Vivekananda preached religious humanism as the basis of world unity. He said every individual is a part of God. God is to be recognized by every one. It is a common belief that the service to mankind is service to God. Every body should help other human beings.

Vivekananda’s humanism was based on his spiritualism. Spiritualism gave an identity to man and established the equality of man. For him human being is the greatest creation in the entire world. Human life is most precious and valuable. Man is superior to all other being on earth.
Vivekananda says that religion is a science and every effort should be made by the individual to establish the truth. Every individual has right to apply his reason to know the truth. He said the concept of adhikarvad, untouchability, suppression of women's right are all against the commands of a civilized society or nation or the teachings of religions. Because of blind faith and superstitious practices there is war in every society. He says that a society or nation should be remodeled with the help of reason. Man should apply his rationality and break those laws that promote orthodoxy and dogmatism. A nation can grow spiritually when superstition is vanished.

Vivekananda says that every problem of society can be solved if people live life of honesty and integrity. Success of man depend upon ethics. Everyman can not be completely honest or perfectly selfless but by trying to be good he will get success. Vivekananda said that the essence of all prayers and worship is to be good for others. Service to mankind is service to God.

According to Vivekananda, there could be no peace or progress without the truth and justice.

Similarly, Azad's nationalism was also humanistic. He was not anti-British but he said Islam does not support the superiority of one people to others. His feeling of nationalism was deeply rooted in his firm faith in Islam because Islam does not support any form of government unless it is based on freedom and democracy.

Azad's nationalism supports communal harmony among all communities. It also means the unity of all people should come through
religion. Love and tolerance are the basic elements of harmony. Every religion preached the truth of brotherhood and opposed the racial prejudices.

Non-violence is a basic element of Azad’s nationalism. He says that the message of Islam is peace for all humanity; it does not support war. Its aim is to end injustice. It was not only based on the interest of only one community. For Azad nationalism stands for the benefit and service of humanity as a whole.

For Azad the true spirit of nationalism implied the unity of religion as based on the unity of God and unity of whole humanity because his idea of the unity was the basis of national integration.

Azad says that Islam supported humanism and did not recognize the prejudice of race, nation, country. It called for only one relationship between man and man, that is, brotherhood. Islam denies the absolute distinctions of race, country, colour and language in the way of achieving universal human brotherhood.