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### **A Comparative Discussion of the Religious Philosophies of Swami Vivekananda, Rabindranath Tagore and Mahatma Gandhi with Special Reference to Humanism in Present Day Context**

**Dr. Naba Kumar Kalita**

*Associate Prof. and Head, Dept. of Philosophy, Chhaygaon College, Chhaygaon*

#### **Abstract**

*According to Vivekananda, the Vedanta is the ground of all religions. Religion, as the most comprehensive whole of human existence, hugs every fact of life. This instinctive feeling is just the divine element in our religious awareness and is again the illogical excitement of our knowledge of the omniscient.*

*Rabindranath Tagore took the concept of divine immanence directly from the Upanisad. In fact, Tagore incorporated both theism and absolutism in his elevated philosophy. He asserted that the realization of one's own nature is true religion. He kept belief neither in religious institution nor in religious practices be it Hinduism or Islam or Christianity.*

*Gandhi elaborated religion not only in individual life but in social life too. Gandhi's social philosophy is important as he expected to bring about total transformation without creating ill will, violence and injustice to any section of the society. He made attempt to establish 'Swaraj' in India through the practice of spiritualism in true sense of the term.*

*The purpose of the research paper is to find out the contributions made by three great contemporary Indian philosophers for establishing humanistic trend not merely in India but the globe as a whole. So far as the method of observation is concerned, a lot of points of agreement have been detected among them.*

*Towards the finding, it is intended that the trend of humanistic philosophy in India has been developed by these philosophers with a message of love and compassion for peaceful co-existence of the world people.*

**Keywords: Comprehensive Whole, Divine Element, Divine Immanence, Total Transformation, True Spiritualism.**

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**Introduction:** Vivekananda explains that intellect is only one of the aspects of life. Though in religion we find the intellectual side, but its practical side is simultaneously very important. Man is led by the deeper urge in him to rise above the egoistic view and makes him to realize the true nature of the Self. That is why Tagore put that man possesses an

expectation within that always walks before our present narrow experience. This experience is undivided Faith in the infinite in us.

In accordance with Vivekananda, religion is the feeling of Reality. It is never a creation of principles but always a spiritual discovery. The significant mark of religious experience is directness, joy, vividness and like. He does not accept any religious act which fails to promote religion as an experience. Therefore, religion may be a bewildering study but never a vain speculation. Keeping consistency with such a view of Vivekananda, we can refer to the feelings of S. Radhakrishnan too who treats religion as a way of life that seeks the eternal. It is more a behaviour than belief. If we believe in God, we must act in the light of that faith. Spirituality is the core and the inward essence of religion.

Gandhi's thought of religion can be said, more or less, as same with the basic teachings of Vivekananda as the former believes that true religion and true morality are inseparable. These are supplementary to each other. Gandhi would like to reject any religious doctrine that conflicts with morality without any hesitation. He even recognized unreasonable religious mentality provided it is not immoral.

### **Objectives of the Study:**

The main objectives of the study are:

- (i) To find out similarities of thoughts among the great three Indian philosophers.
- (ii) To establish the necessity of the humanism in the Indian context.
- (iii) To establish the importance of Advaita Vedanta.

**Methodology:** The methods of the study were descriptive and analytical with the purpose of studying the religious philosophies of three great Indian philosophers in the context of humanism. Both primary and secondary data were analyzed for the study.

### **A Comparative Discussion of the Religious Philosophies of Swami Vivekananda, Rabindranath Tagore and Mahatma Gandhi with Special Reference to Humanism.**

Humanism was the dominant note in the philosophy of Vivekananda and religion. He has put forward different ways regarding how religion could be treated as a necessary aspect of life. Vivekananda puts that religion is a growth from within, it is inherent in the very constitution of man, and therefore, the nature of religion can be known by analyzing the religious sense. Vivekananda explained this sense more or less in the manner of a psychologist.

Tagore was more concerned with God and took the absolute as his secondary aspect though he synthesized theism with absolutism. It is to be mentioned that Tagore did not mention the word 'Absolute' in the 'Religion of Man' even once. He denounced the empty absolute of the Advaitins who reduced the world to nothingness. In accordance with Tagore, God is greater than the impersonal absolute. He conceived God to be the supreme person who was absolutely perfect, absolutely omniscient, absolutely omnipresent, absolutely kind and absolutely in all his powers, qualities and existence. He pointed out that God is the absolute.

Gandhi explained that caste and class division merely impeded social progress. Hence, the socialist ideal of classless society must be accepted. The ideal of 'sarvodaya'-upliftment of all was given by Gandhi to Indians and to the world as a mean of complete social change. Gandhi's non-violent approach towards social reconstruction made him a distinct and unique kind of social reformer and ushered in a new era of humanism. Gandhi was a great socialist of this country. He took belief, as Ruskin has put in his book 'Unto this last' that "good of the individual is contained in the good of all". The only real and dignified human doctrine is the greatest good of all and this can be achieved by utmost self-service. Gandhi directed all his energy and enthusiasm towards removing the economic inequality and social injustice he saw around him.

In accordance with Gandhi, economic equality meant the leveling down of the rich people on the one hand and leveling up of the poor people on the other. For Gandhi, Sarvodaya was the highest end of human life. He also put that self-realization or the realization of God is our highest end. Gandhi said that self-realization does not mean finding out some such unique reality within oneself which is so separate from all else in the universe. The first lesson of Sarvodaya is to realize other in oneself and oneself in other. Again, working for Sarvodaya or self-realization is also one and the same thing. According to Gandhi, both can be achieved by adopting the way of complete 'ahimsa' or non-violence, universal love and brotherhood and selfless social service; and not through any 'tapasya' or deep meditation in the jungle.

Vivekananda explained that a simple insight in the nature of various religions will reveal that different religions are not actually contradictory to each other, rather supplementary to each other. The truth of religion, according to Vivekananda, is so comprehensive that different religions concentrated merely on one aspect or on a few aspects of religion. Again, he asserted that there may be contradictory points of view of the same thing, but these are basically views of the same reality and so all the same and hence supplementary to each other. That is why Vivekananda pointed out that the universal religion already exists. He, by universal religion, did not mean a religion that will have one universal philosophy or one universal mythology or one universal ritual. He opined that though there is difference from sect to sect, even from individual to individual and yet universal religion is there. Acceptance, in accordance with Vivekananda, is one watchword for universal religion. He recommended positive acceptance. That is why he expressed that he could worship in any form with any individual or sect. He said that he could enter and offer his prayers anywhere in a temple or a church or a mosque or any other place. Vivekananda clearly revealed that the believer in the universal religion should be broad-minded and open-hearted and he should be prepared to believe in the scriptures of all religions and keep his heart open for what may come in the future. Such an approach led Vivekananda to discover at least one such element which could be said to be common to all religions in a general way, and which consequently may represent the essence of universal religion.

God was that common point for Vivekananda. He asserted that all living beings – men, animals and plants were all one and accordingly talked of various aspects of the truth as

aspects of the same truth, they were all one. To Vivekananda, God is that truth; we are all one in Him. The term God was used by Vivekananda in its most comprehensive meaning, it may be personal omnipotent and good God or it may be explained as the universal existence or the ultimate unity of the universe. Each and every religion, Vivekananda observed, consciously or unconsciously is struggling for realization of this unity or God and that is why this may be mentioned to represent the ideal of universal religion.

Acceptability to all minds is another significant characteristic of universal religion for Vivekananda. He endeavoured to propagate a religion acceptable to all minds and also it should equally be mystic and conducive to action. It is to be noted that Gandhi, like Vivekananda, too attempted to give equal status to all religions. But unlike Vivekananda, he didn't talk about universal religion. Gandhi pointed out that all religions possess imperfections, as all of them reveal merely partial and relative truths, but again all are equally holy because all are creations of the same God. Gandhi says whenever we lose the moral basis, we lose our religious character. Religion should, at any rate, not over-ride morality. For instance, man can't be untruthful, cruel and uncontrolled and claim to attain God without following a definite moral code of conduct.

Tagore ultimately kept belief in what he called 'The Religion of Man' instead of his initial combination of some elements of 'Brahma samaj' with some elements of orthodox Hinduism. He, like Vivekananda, clearly believed that religion could not be confined to any group or sect or tribe or nation. According to him, man picked up that particular religion that suited him, but final analysis reveals that religion transcends all such particular forms. The realization of one's kinship with everything is the aim of true religion. Tagore puts that religion was a sort of home sickness. He clarified that there should not have confusion between true religion and what is called 'Institutional religion'. He earnestly believed religious organizations possess almost debauched religion. Vivekananda's religion, like Tagore, is not confined to temples, books, churches, rituals and other outer forms. Religion, to Vivekananda, doesn't mean a set of dogmas nor does it mean conformity to rites and rituals. Equal status to all religions in the world was the mission of Vivekananda. He vehemently opposed the forceful conversion of religion.

Tagore regarded the ultimate reality as the personal God, the infinite being comprised of all finite souls and the world of matter. The poet-philosopher even, in similar voice with Vivekananda, put that the Infinite becomes the finite without losing its infinity. Both the philosophers raised similar voice regarding God could only be realized or experienced from within.

By the influence of the humanistic tradition of Buddha and the Buddhist way of life, Tagore favoured a humanistic religious philosophy. He, like Kabir, treated the universe as the manifestation of God. Again, being inspired by the Gita, Tagore, like Vivekananda and other contemporary Indian philosophers, comments in his 'Sadhana' that man cannot have freedom from action, rather we can have the same in action. It is to be noted that

Vivekananda, like Tagore, too was immensely influenced by the Gita especially by the notion of Niskamakarma.

Spiritualism of Tagore is humanistic. He stressed the role of national humanistic religion. Tagore and Vivekananda were also pained at the division of the Hindu society on the basis of caste, religious beliefs and sex. Wateriness is essentially is the religion for water, fire is the religion of the spark of the flame. Similarly, human religion lies in his inner most truth. In this way, to him, religion consists in the attempt of man to cultivate and reveal these qualities inherent in human nature, and to have faith in them. Vivekananda, like Tagore, points out that religion of man is the realization of unity of individual soul with the supreme soul

As a unique humanist, Tagore endeavoured to raise humanity to the level of the ultimate reality. Extremes of immanence and transcendence are reconciled in his view of God and man. Human personality is regarded by him as the principle of unity. It's no individuality but universality. Therefore, Vivekananda's religion, like Tagore, at times seems to take the colour of a humanistic religion. Vivekananda puts that God is everywhere in everything, but he resides specially in the poor and the helpless. So, to Vivekananda, serving the poor is the greatest form of religion. Tagore's religion explains man and God as necessary to each other. The humanistic interpretation of religion by Tagore expresses that his religion is the religion of man where the infinite is revealed in humanity. Agreeing with Vivekananda, Tagore commented that humanity is a necessary factor in perfecting the Divine Truth. Like Tagore, Vivekananda too considered religion as consisting of love, kindness and sympathy towards others.

To Tagore, religion is not confined to any group or sect or tribe or nation. Man discovers the particular form of religion that suits him, but finally religion transcends all particular forms. Tagore puts true religion is the realization of one's kinship with everything. In the 'Gitanjali', he bursts out in a religious fervor, "No more sailing from harbour to harbor with this my weather-beaten boat...Now I am eager to die into the deathless" (Tagore, 1997). Tagore turned down asceticism and affirmed man will realize his kinship with everything by cultivating the universal feeling of love and compassion.

One thing is clear that religion for Tagore consists in man's capacity of self-transcendence. Man bears a self-awareness that makes him realize his capacity of going beyond himself towards higher and higher regions. So, the religious life of man consists in ceaseless exercise of his capacity.

Vivekananda points out that religion invariably possesses a super natural content. He indicates, super natural may be anything—a personal God or the absolute or a super natural law or anything of this kind. To him, this element is the object of religious expectation and hence represents the core of religion. Further he said that religion transcends not only the limitations of the senses but also the power of reasoning. For him, religion possesses a value and significance for the individual but it possesses a social content too.

Gandhi, like Vivekananda, revealed his chief conviction that there is one reality – that of God, and no more than Truth, i.e., Truth is God and sincere pursuit of Truth is religion. Generally speaking, religion indicates a devotion to some higher power or principle. Gandhi's position cannot be said to be against such explanation of religion, rather he merely upgrades it by saying that higher principle being Truth, devotion to Truth (God) is religion. In this respect, Gandhi puts that by religion, he does not mean the Hindu religion. Rather, he prefers the religion that transcends Hinduism and its faiths. For Gandhi, religion must alter one's very nature and character, and gets binding to the truth firmly from within that may ever purify. In fact, religion may be said to be the permanent element in the nature of human beings. It naturally reflects the untiring zeal of the soul absolutely restless for reaching the permanent reality. This journey of the soul leaves until it discovers itself, knowing the ever great maker and appreciating the perfect relationship between the Absolute and the finite soul itself. For Gandhi, all religions are nothing but the different ways converging on the same ultimate goal. So, if different groups of human race accept various ways to reach the same goal, it doesn't matter at all. Theoretically speaking, since there is merely one God, so there must be one religion in the world. But, in practice, it's not an easy task to detect a common agreement among the followers of various religions. Gandhi explained that he didn't see the possibility of there would be only one religion, in practice, on the earth in the time to come. Hence, different religions will always be answering to different temperaments and climatic environment. To Gandhi, men are naturally seekers of God which is but Truth as they still remain imperfect to attain the perfect state of Truth or God. That is why the religion achieved by them must also be imperfect. He says that the religion forcing man to accept a particular religious practice by claiming itself as perfect should not really be considered as a religion. Gandhi shows no soft corner for proselytization. Rather he comments that a true religion should create fellowship among people. All followers of different faiths should have mutual respect for each other. One should always keep in mind that all religions possess certain errors in them, and that all great religions are equal. In this regard, Gandhi, clarifying his position, says that all the great religions of the world are fundamentally as well as basically equal. Therefore, we should possess intrinsic respect for other religions as we possess the same for our own religion traditions and beliefs.

To Gandhi, all man-made religions are imperfect and hence the question of superiority and inferiority does not arise at all. All followers should consider each religion as equal. Moreover, every follower should correct the defects of his own faith, and thereby uniting all good traits of other faiths into his own faith. Gandhi very significantly says that if we look at all the religions of the world with equal reverence, we would definitely not hesitate to think over it to be our duty to mingle into our traditions and beliefs each and every acceptable characteristic of other thoughts

He recommends tolerance and respect as two bases for the attitude towards different religions. Although there is allegation against Gandhi as possessing a special preference towards Hinduism, his attitude towards other religions is one of reverence. He was born in a

Hindu family, and naturally, he was highly influenced by the environment which helped the elements of Hinduism grow in his mind. Thus, the Gita and the Ramayana became his two inseparable companions. But he studied many great religious scriptures like the Bible and the Quran and was influenced by many saints and religious teachers. These made him believe that different religions are the different ways of achieving the same truth.

Gandhi said in 1921 that he had, after long study and experience, come to the conclusion that all religions are almost as dear to him as his own Hinduism. He also asserted that all human beings should be as lovable and compassionate to one as one's own family members. Gandhi's own reverence for other faiths and traditions was as similar as that of his own; therefore, according to him, the matter of conversion isn't possible. Each and every one should aim at helping a Hindu to be a better Hindu, a Musalman for becoming a better Musalman, and a Christian to be a better Christian. We should pray God to give others not only the light of knowledge, but all the light of knowledge, wisdom and truth they need for their all-round development. Gandhi called upon all human beings just to pray almighty to make them better men, irrespective of their form of religion.

**Conclusion:** From the above discussion, it is distinct that Vivekananda, Tagore and Gandhi give to the world a reality and assert the dignity of humanness. Their belief is ideal of life can be achieved merely by transcending the finite world.

Gandhi explains religion as a mighty tree that absorbs its sap from the moral height of people who possess religion. Life without religion is like life without principle, and life without principle is like a ship without rudder. He advocates Hinduism as a religion acceptable to all. In fact, religion for Gandhi was spiritual humanism as he explained that the service of the poor, 'Daridranarayana' in his own language, is the service of God in real sense of the term. He discovered God through his creation confining not merely to India, his native land and Hinduism. Rather, the creation has been confined to the religion he belonged. Gandhi believed that the true enhancement of our society can be made through the assimilation of the best principles of all the world religions. His religion, in similar voice with Swami Vivekananda and Rabindranath Tagore, didn't confine to books, Temples, Churches, rituals and other external forms.

R. Tagore accepts the ultimate reality as the personal God. He says, liberation of the finite soul lies in its own isolation from the infinite God. Here, we see the reflection of Advaita Vedanta too. He advocates the religion of man and utters like Vivekananda that service to man is service to God. Divinization of man and humanization of God are two most significant factors in the religious philosophy of Tagore. Regarding humanization of God, Tagore said that it doesn't indicate only God of humanity but the God in every man. To Tagore, humanity is the very essence of religion. Human aspect, according to him, forms the foundation of religion. He emphasized on humanity and divinity as not belonging to two separate orders; rather complementary to each other. Like Vivekananda, Tagore too believed that religion awakens the element of divinity latent in human beings. In similar

voice with Gandhi, the poet-philosopher said that the aim of religion should always be uniting force, and not the dividing force.

Vivekananda upholds the notion of humanism in the light of practical Vedanta. His religious philosophy appears very much dynamic, practical, constructive, influential and mainly man-oriented concrete philosophy. Humanism is his mission which includes establishment of welfare of human society. Vivekananda gave importance to brotherhood, integrated religions, positive thinking, feeling and willing to give birth to universal religion against fanaticism and communal disharmony. He possessed very high reverence towards Vedanta philosophy received from Sankara. He explained that man can become Brahman through the path of true religious faith.

The great three contemporary Indian philosophers agree in uttering true religious spirit embraces the unity of all people avoiding the points of differences. They didn't believe in religious institution and practices be it Hinduism or Islam or Christianity. Gandhi, like Vivekananda, took religion to be self-realization. Both the philosophers believed in the essential unity of all religions of the world. Gandhi's saying 'each religion has its own contribution to make to human evolution' reminds us of Vivekananda's view that religions are 'different forces in the economy of god, working for the good of mankind.' Again, Gandhi's view 'the soul of religions is one, but it is encased in a multitude forms' seems a reflection of Vivekananda's saying 'Every religion has a soul behind it, and that soul may differ from the soul of another religion.'

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