



## ***Pratidhwani the Echo***

*A Peer-Reviewed International Journal of Humanities & Social Science*

**ISSN: 2278-5264 (Online) 2321-9319 (Print)**

**Impact Factor: 6.28 (Index Copernicus International)**

*Volume-IX, Issue-I, October 2020, Page No. 137-143*

*Published by Dept. of Bengali, Karimganj College, Karimganj, Assam, India*

*Website: <http://www.thecho.in>*

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## **An Analytical Overview of the Religious Interpretations of Swami Vivekananda and Sri Aurobindo**

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### **Abstract:**

*Sri Aurobindo greatly admired and reiterated the view of Vivekananda on the diversity of religious interpretations in Indian context. In similar tune with Vivekananda, he declared that the people will have the perfect state of the unity of all religions as and when every man takes his own religion for the cause of spiritual development suited to one's nature. Sri Aurobindo, an Indian nationalist, freedom fighter, philosopher, yogi, guru and poet, joined Indian freedom struggle against the British and turned into a spiritual reformer with visions on progress of human beings and evolution from spiritual perspective. To Vivekananda, from the high spiritual level of the Vedanta philosophy to low level of idolatry with varied mythology, Buddhists' agnosticism, and Jains' atheism, all possess room in Hinduism. Against European aggressive and illogical idea of a single religion for all men, Vivekananda asserted that the Hindus have got their religion through revelation, the Vedas, the accumulated treasury of spiritual laws discovered in different times by various persons. That is to say, he presented before the world people the religion of the Advaita as the source of perfection.*

**Keywords:** *Evolution, Religion of Advaita, Spiritual Development, Vedanta Philosophy, Varied Mythology.*

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**Introduction:** Vivekananda expresses that truth, virtue and purity are all not destructible. Man has spent centuries to detect the true nature of himself. He is not what he appears to be but someone greater than whatever is taken for granted. Vivekananda asserts that it is not possible for man to be delinked with religion so long as he holds up his mind and body. This religious struggle will continue and one will have some forms of religion as long as one relates oneself to the process of thinking. This perspective of Vivekananda contradicts the Freudian conception of religion. Sigmund Freud in his book "The Future of an Illusion", reveals that religion is not real. That is to say, religion is an illusion. Freud apprehended that religion originates from the crisis and helpless nature of man.

Sri Aurobindo, one of the great contemporary Indian philosophers, says that the success of a religion depends upon the spiritual element within it. According to him, a religion, which expects for spiritual freedom of mankind, is to be judged as an efficient religion. He

asserts that God or the ultimate reality is the object of man's religious experience. The search and finding of God is the essence of religion. In this respect, Aurobindo prefers to put that fear of God is the beginning of religion. Sri Aurobindo, following the footsteps of the ancient Indian philosophers, declares that in religious experience, there is an apprehension of the real, a spiritual realization of God. Thus, it can be said that an element of mysticism is involved in the religious thinking of Sri Aurobindo.

### **An Analytical Overview of the Religious Interpretations of Swami Vivekananda and Sri Aurobindo**

The philosophical boundaries of the Upanishads influenced Vivekananda's concept of religion. His principle in life is essentially determined by the teachings of the Vedas and the Vedanta. We can have the explanation of the term 'Religion' in the philosophy of Vivekananda as "...Essentially religion belongs to the super sensuous plane. It is beyond all reasoning. It is never determined by the plane of intellect. It is a vision, an inspiration, a plunge into the unknown and unknowable, making the unknowable more than known..."<sup>1</sup>From the very dawn of human civilization, this search of the unknown has been going on. Vivekananda like Tagore clearly explains that religion belongs to the intrinsic world of man; it springs out from within. Thus, ultimately in his religion spirituality is connected with beauty. In this way, religion consists in the attempt of man at cultivating and expressing those qualities that are inherent in the nature of man.

In religious philosophy of Vivekananda, philosophy and religion are consistent with each other. Due to the realization of 'oneness', Vivekananda drew parallel between the beliefs of Hinduism and the basic theories of modern sciences that appear as the echoes of the Vedanta philosophy. Vivekananda here further says that the ideal of Hinduism lies in its catholicity and universality. It can be the possible ideal for a universal religion, a religion that's the sum total of all creeds and yet there is infinite space for upliftment, if it is realized in a perfect manner.

It can be seen through a partial analysis of the religious views of Sri Aurobindo that he is against the observance of external ceremonial or authoritative religion. In this respect, Sri Aurobindo opines that insistence on the religion mentioned above leads to discords, disputations, persecutions etc. He does not accept the ceremonial religion as he keeps belief that religion should be subjective in nature and character.

It is here to be noted that Sri Aurobindo resembles Vivekananda, M. K. Gandhi and Dr. S. Radhakrishnan when he emphasizes on the improvement of the religious qualities such as altruism, humanitarianism, love of neighbor, mercy to all creation, service, labour for the well-being of the poor people and so on. According to him, all religions should look upon themselves as friendly partners and then only it will pave the way to possibility of the world unity. He passes remarks that negation of spiritual life is the cause of religious war. To him, the great religions of the world should work hand in hand for making the lives of human beings enrich in spirituality.

In accordance with Sri Aurobindo, religion is evolutionary. He puts forward a detail analysis of what is called religion in conformity with his theory of spiritual evolution as the central theme of his philosophy is the theory of the evolution. Sri Aurobindo says that

religion has to satisfy the fundamental requirements of human life, he points out a wider purpose of Nature behind this object. It wants not only to heighten but also to widen, not merely evolution but also integration, not merely fulfilment of physical, vital and mental, but merely an upliftment of all into spiritual, a psychicisation, spiritualization and unity with Sachidananda. Sri Aurobindo reminds us that the career of religion has merely just commenced, leading man towards a vision of himself beyond the fortuitous circumstances of his 'history'. Sri Aurobindo, unlike Vivekananda, projects the differences between the Eastern and the Western religions through his notions of 'true religion' and 'religionism'. Moreover, the peculiar thing in respect of Sri Aurobindo is that the culmination of religion is Yoga. That is to say, religion may be said to be a half-way house from mind to spirit. Sri Aurobindo says that there should have place to Yoga to make man enter into spirituality. In this way, he upholds that not religion but Yoga is the way to divine that is not exact to Vivekananda's religious position. Of course, Yoga, to Sri Aurobindo, doesn't annihilate religion, philosophy or science, but find place for all of them and utilize them as instruments for God realization. Here, it is to be mentioned that Sri Aurobindo, like Vivekananda, too very effectively exhibits before the world community the principles of Hinduism. He explains that Hinduism isn't a creed but a mass of thought collected round the Vedanta, stressing not belief but conduct, accepting graduated levels of apprehension and searching for a meaningful understanding and also refining the existing content. The most significant point is that Sri Aurobindo has been capable of presenting before the world community the broad attitude of Indian religions especially Hinduism.

The well-known thinker Haridas Choudhury says regarding the philosophy of Sri Aurobindo as, "The philosophy of Sri Aurobindo may aptly be described as integral non-dualism (Purna Advaita), or integral idealism (Purna Vijnana), or just integralism (Purnavada)."<sup>2</sup> The philosophy of Sri Aurobindo synthesizes or integrates the two. He, in this context, says, "The affirmation of a Divine Life upon earth and an immortal sense in mortal existence can have no base unless we recognize not only eternal spirit as the inhabitant of this bodily mansion, the wearer of this mutable robe, but accept matter of which it is made, as a fit and noble material out of which he weaves constantly His garbs, builds recurrently the unending series of his mansions."<sup>3</sup> To Sri Aurobindo, the attainment of the Divine Life is the chief objective of the human beings. Therefore, it may be called the best way the human mind should require to detect in life, the religious contemplation for mankind. He, keeping consistency with his theory of spiritual evolution, expounds his theory of religion. That is to say, his spiritual evolution ascends through the relative to the absolute, through the finite to the infinite and through all divisions to oneness.

It follows that the inmost essence of religion, in accordance with Sri Aurobindo, is the search for and finding of God. According to Sri Aurobindo, the object of religion is attained through self-transcendence, absolute consecration, aspiration and experience, revelation, inspiration and intuition etc. The important thing is that the delight of God-realization is ineffable; devotee has to surrender his entire being towards the absolute. The way of religion may certainly be said to be absolute.

Vivekananda may be said to be a great lover of Vedantic philosophy. He preached monism or Advaita Vedantism through which he showed his toleration towards every religion. He spoke the message of Vedanta about the world unity and to believe shapeless God. As a monk, Vivekananda played a significant role in growing Indian nationalism of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century, reinterpreting and harmonizing certain aspects of Hinduism. His teachings and philosophy applied this reinterpretation to various aspects of education, faith, character building as well as social issues relating to India, and was also instrumental in respect of introducing Yoga to the west.

Vivekananda said that the future of a country depends on its people, stating that man-making was his mission. Also he said that divinity is to be manifested in every movement of life by way of preaching the same unto human beings. According to Vivekananda, religion is nothing but a waste theory. He put that religion is being and becoming, not hearing or acknowledging; the whole soul getting changed into what it believes. He was highly dissatisfied with the religious rituals that were in practice during that time. He again said that religion is the idea that is raising the brute into man, and man into God. Religion for him was chief concern after self-realization.

He may be said to be a key figure in the introduction of the Indian philosophies of Vedanta and Yoga to the Western world and definitely credited with enhancing interfaith awareness, thereby bringing Hinduism to the status of a major world religion during the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Vivekananda has been treated as a major force in the revival of Hinduism in India, and made contribution to the concept of nationalism in colonial India. To him, all living beings are embodiments of the Divine Self, so, service to God could be rendered by service to mankind.

Vivekananda regarded Hinduism as the mother of all religions which was established by him through historical sequence. He established how Vedic religion had influenced Buddhism which again became instrumental in influencing Christianity. He said that all the world religions possess the same value as well as importance. In the parliament of world's religions in 1893, he said that the Christian needs not to become a Hindu or a Buddhist to become a Christian; but each must assimilate the spirit of the others preserving own individuality and grow as per own law of growth... there should be written upon the banner of every religion...'Help and not fight', 'Assimilation and not Destruction', 'Harmony and peace, and not Dissension'. In this way, Vivekananda indicated the importance of his universal religion and thereby he preached the unity of God. He pointed out that though the different religions possess different paths, but the goal is same. He gave more importance to the unity of all religions and their fusion into one universal religion.

Vivekananda kept belief in monism, i.e., he was a firm believer on one God. His chief contention was to establish a link among different religions. He upheld that as water of different rivers mingles in the sea, in the same way, every religion finds itself at the feet of God. He saw no difference between a Veda or Koran or Bible; and Temple, Mosque and Church were naturally equal for him. He preferred to meditate at any place without any inhibition in his mind. He, through his preaching of monism or Advaita Vedanta, showed

his tolerance towards other religions. He advocated the message of Vedanta as to the world unity and to keep belief in shapeless God.

Sri Aurobindo developed a spiritual practice he named Integral Yoga. Evolution of human life into a divine life was the central theme of Aurobindo's vision. He kept belief in a spiritual realization that not merely liberated but transformed human nature, making possible a divine life on earth. He was a prominent religious guru who left behind a substantial body of enlightening literature. Although Sri Aurobindo was a Hindu scholar, yet he didn't prefer to develop any religion. He suggested the world people to promote an inner self-development through which every human being can see the oneness in all and attain an elevated consciousness that will externalize the god-like attributes in a man.

His major works comprises of *The Life Divine, The Synthesis of Yoga, Essays on the Gita, Commentaries on the Isha Upanishad, Powers Within*—all are dealing with the great knowledge that had been achieved by him through the practice of Yoga. He asserted that Hinduism offered itself no name as it sets no sectarian limits: it claimed no universal adhesion, upheld no sole unerring dogma, set up no single way of salvation; it appears less a creed or cult than a continuously enlarging tradition of the Godward attempt of the human spirit. An immense many-sided and many staged provision for a spiritual self-building and self-detecting. According to Sri Aurobindo, Hinduism possesses right to speak of itself the eternal religion, Sanatana Dharma. Like Vivekananda, Sri Aurobindo too endeavoured to establish Advaita Vedantic trend based on Hinduism as the origin of all the religious traditions of the world.

For Sri Aurobindo, the Vedantic Formula “One without a second” must be interpreted in the light of the other truth “All this is Brahman.” The standard of reality in respect of Sri Aurobindo is that ‘Truth has to be sought in a larger and complete affirmation.’ The basic principle of Sri Aurobindo's philosophy of the Life Divine or the Realistic Advaita is “Brahman; Isvara is all this by His Yoga-maya.” He says, Godhead comes into birth by His self-maya whenever the decline of dharma and uprising of adharma happen. Thus, the crisis of spiritual character invites Avatara or descent. He explained two aspects of the Divine birth: one is the descent, i.e., God becomes manifest in the human form and nature and the other is ascent, i.e. the ascent of man into the Godhead.

Vivekananda desired men to be inspired by the ideals of Advaita Vedanta. Because the religion of Advaita says that conflicts among the world religions are only apparent, and they don't affect the internal heart of religion. Really speaking, Vivekananda admits sects and conflicts because if we think the similar thought there remains, in fact, nothing else to be thought. But men, to him, are lost so much in the external conflicts of religion that men fail to realize its presence. Human beings must see, through neutral self-realization, the very oneness that the concept of the universal religion reveals among the world religions. Once men realize this fundamental truth, all conflicts, all quarrels in the name of religion will automatically be vanished followed by the domain of love and compassion, i. e., service to mankind, needy and down-trodden. Vivekananda inherited such a beautiful exposition from his spiritual Guru Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa.

Sri Aurobindo, also, talks about the spiritual oneness between the self and the supreme reality. His vision of the oneness on the supreme reality has been the base for his philosophy. He was greatly influenced by the declaration of Lord Sri Krishna in the Bhagavad Gita: “At the end of many lives, the man of wisdom comes to me, realizing that Vasudeva is all, he is great soul, he is very difficult to find.”<sup>4</sup> Aurobindo noticed the presence of Vasudeva in every man and called upon for a spiritual evolution to understand the real nature of the Life Divine.

**Conclusion:** Vivekananda, although embracing and propagating Universalism, treated Hinduism the best of all religions, and Advaita Vedanta the best of what Indian religious thought had to offer. To Vivekananda, the greatest unfortunate thing in the world is that we don’t attempt at tolerating and accepting other religious beliefs and practices. He asserts that each and every one must not merely tolerate other religions, but positively embrace them, since the truth is the basis of all religions.

Sri Aurobindo asserted that India may said be to be the meeting place of all the religions of the world; and Hinduism, among these, alone appears a vast and complex one, not more religion but a great diversified and yet consistently unification of spiritual thought, realization and profound inspiration. Hinduism, to him, is the most skeptical and the most believing of all, skeptical as it has made question and experiment about the most, believing because it possesses the deepest experience and the most varied and positive spiritual knowledge. To him, Hinduism, wider in attitudes, isn’t a dogma or combination of dogmas but a law of life; it’s not a social framework but the spirit of a past and future social evolution, rejecting nothing but insisting on testing and experiencing everything and when tested and experienced turning into soulful. Aurobindo puts that we find, in Hinduism, the basis of future religions of the world. This Sanatana Dharma comprises of various scriptures: *The Veda, the Vedanta, the Gita, the Upanishads, the Darshanas, the Puranas, the Tantra*...but its real, authoritative scripture is in the heart, the dwelling of the Eternal.

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