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An Analytical Interpretation of the Religious Philosophies of Swami Vivekananda and Dr. S. Radhakrishnan with Special Reference to the Ultimate Reality in man

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Abstract:

The great philosopher Dr. S. Radhakrishnan explains that religion is nothing but the insight into the nature of Reality (darsana) or experience of Reality (anubhava). This experience may be said to be the response of the whole personality, the integrated Self to the central Reality. According to him, religion is the self-manifestation of the Ultimate Reality in man. It is the awareness of our true nature in God: here is a way the individual organizes the inward being and responds to what is 'envisaged by him as the Ultimate Reality'.

Swami Vivekananda considers religion as belonging to the super sensuous plane that has not been detected so vividly in the thoughts of other contemporary philosophers. He says that religion in the sense plane is not possible. His concept of supernaturalism has paved the way to a concrete shape to his idea of morality, socialism, practical Vedanta, individual freedom and education in different paths. Such idea has immensely influenced his faith in the 'direct experience of the spirit' as taught by his spiritual master Sri Ramakrishna.

Keywords: Integrated Self, Reality, Sense Plane, Super Sensuous, Supernaturalism, Whole Personality

Introduction: For Vivekananda, religion is based on realization which is intrinsic as well as spiritual in nature and character. He advocated the universal religion with a view to making a congenial atmosphere amongst all religious people. According to him, man should exercise harmony, unity and brotherhood. Vivekananda prefers to enforce love as the greatest power that can be used in solving all problems. Love has been taken by most of the contemporary Indian thinkers as an individual virtue. The important point is that if the contemporary Indian thinkers didn't contribute to the people of India, then India would have been backward in each and every aspect. Vivekananda loved all people and encouraged them to live in a harmonious way as he regarded unity and harmony as the prime requisite for true religious life. His love was neither intellectual nor sentimental; rather it was based on the fact that in his eyes there could be no bad or evil men in the world as all such men are the creatures of the same God. The contributions and ideas of Vivekananda are getting more applause all over the world today.

Radhakrishnan may be said to be influenced to some extent by Plato and Sankaracharya. He desired to expound Sansara's Advaita in the light of the idealistic tradition of the West. He clearly declared Advaita as Absolute Idealism. "It is my opinion" says Radhakrishnan, "that systems which

play the game of philosophy fairly and squarely, with freedom from presuppositions and religious mentality end in Absolute Idealism”.¹ He advocates that a religion without having importance to social reform and international justice possesses no appeal towards the modern mind. He puts, “The believer in God loves his fellow-men as he loved himself, seeking their highest good as he seeks his own, by redemptive service and self-sacrifice. He will put justice above civilization, truth above patriotism.”² A real religious soul will identify with social and human revolution and guide mankind for better and fuller life.

Objectives of the Study:

The main objectives of the study are:

- (i) To find out similarities of thoughts among the great two Indian philosophers.
- (ii) To establish the necessity of the analytical approaches in the context of Indian philosophy.
- (iii) To establish the importance of intellectualism along with spiritualism in contemporary Indian philosophy.

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

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The essential and positive elements of all the religions especially Christianity, Buddhism, Jainism, Hinduism and Islam were taken by Vivekananda and thereby he made attempt at assimilating it in his own way. This exhibits that the acceptance of Vivekananda is not just tolerance. Tolerance directs something that is permitted in spite of its being wrong. Vivekananda recommended positive acceptance and he did not refer to religion either as an institution or as an association. He instead referred to the spirit of religion.

Vivekananda did not consciously involve in the controversy relating to personal and impersonal nature of God. As a matter of fact, God was explained by Vivekananda on both ways and he was convinced that this difference between a personal God and an impersonal God is not God's nature in any way. He kept observation that God is what He is and the distinction between personal and impersonal God is the consequence of our endeavours to apprehend God. In accordance with Vivekananda, God can't be described and our language is inadequate to represent Him in an accurate manner. To him, to call God father, or brother, or our dearest friend is nothing but attempts to objectify God which cannot be done. Vivekananda passes comment that God is the eternal subject of everything. Vivekananda's greatest contribution towards Indian philosophy consisted in a new interpretation of the Advaita Vedanta. This new interpretation of Vedanta is known as Neo-Vedantism of Vivekananda that has been alienated from the traditional Vedanta propounded by Adiguru Sankaracharya. The formulation of what he named the practical Vedanta may definitely be called a remarkable characteristic of Vivekananda's philosophy. It is to be noted that Vivekananda borrowed the doctrine of 'Maya' from Advaita Vedanta, but the conception of 'Maya' advocated by him is not exactly similar to that of Sankara. 'Maya' in the Advaita Vedanta is the power which creates illusion; it is that divine power which possesses the capacity of deluding man into believing that the world is real. This position was not accepted by Vivekananda. According to him, 'Maya' did not necessarily mean being illusory or unreal, 'Maya' is apprehended just as a fact regarding the nature of the world, it wants to reveal the essential characters of the world as it exists. In accordance

with Vivekananda, contradiction is another name for 'Maya'. He says that the whole life of man is a contradiction, a mixture of being and non-being. When 'Maya', according to him, gives way merely to find that all the time it was lying within the bosom of the Brahman itself. This indicates that Vivekananda somehow gave to the world also a reality. But it cannot be denied that the metaphysics and disciplines of Vivekananda does not deviate an inch from the standpoint of Advaita Vedanta of Sankara.

It is to be noted that Radhakrishnan is universally accepted as one of the greatest religious philosophers of the world. Really speaking, he was a thinker and an idealist of the 20th century. From this point of view, he may surely be said to be a Neo-Vedantin. The classical upanisadic thought was given a new orientation by Radhakrishnan. The Advaitic Vedanta of Sankaracharya was reinterpreted by him. The views of the Upanisads were neither recapitulated nor endorsed by Radhakrishnan. These works were carried out by him as a scholar, thinker and an idealist of the 20th century. That is why his Vedanta is not identical with that of Sankara and the Upanisads.

Religion has been defined by Radhakrishnan as the insight into the nature of Reality. According to him, this experience was the response of the whole personality, the integrated self to the central reality. Religion was rejected by him as a consistent attempt to apprehend truth. He pointed out that the purpose of life was not the enjoyment of the world, but the education of the soul. In accordance with Radhakrishnan, *sravana*, *manana* and *nididhyasana* (hearing, reflection and disciplined meditation respectively) are the three stages of religious life, and one has to rise from one stage to another.

According to Radhakrishnan, no religion is perfect as religion is a process of movement or growth where the new rests on the old. Radhakrishnan felt that the different religions of the world are like comrades in a joint enterprise for facing the common problems of peaceful co-existence, international welfare and justice, social equality and political independence. He used these as the foundation for the upliftment of the human culture. It has also been asserted by him that a religion without giving importance to social reforms and international justice possesses no appeal to the modern mind like Vivekananda.

In the eyes of Radhakrishnan, the God-believer loves his fellowmen as he keeps love for himself. He desires their highest good as he desires his own by redemptive service and self-sacrifice. Radhakrishnan puts that the God-believer can bring justice above civilization, truth and patriotism. To him, religion may be many on account of the divergence and the same like Vivekananda. Radhakrishnan puts, "Religion is not a creed or a code but an insight into reality."³ This insight, according to him, will reveal that man is always confronted with something greater than himself. This greater spirit is somehow immanent in the human soul as the eternal or the Absolute Reality present in the soul of man as its secret ground. It forms a bridge between the finite and the infinite. Radhakrishnan very clearly mention that the essence of religion is insight into this truth.

Radhakrishnan has designated the Absolute or the Brahman both in the Indian way and in the western manner. He calls it the Brahman at a time and the Absolute at other time. His absolute contained in it the element both the Advaita Vedanta and the Hegelian tradition. Radhakrishnan, too, in similar voice with Advaita Vedantist kept belief that the Absolute does not have any internal differentiation. According to him, the differentiation that we perceive is so merely from the point of view of creation. The Absolute has been conceived by Radhakrishnan as pure consciousness, pure freedom and infinite possibility. The first two characters have been explained more or less in the Vedantic manner. The third character is described in the way of Hegel's Absolute Idealism. In

accordance with Radhakrishnan, the Absolute has to be spiritual in nature, and he called the Absolute the whole of perfection. Everything else, for him, is imperfect. Radhakrishnan, in respect of God and the Absolute, asserts his position with putting that the supreme is achieved as expressing itself in two ways- Absolute and Isvara. The former is the object of metaphysical expectation, God of the religious aspiration. Radhakrishnan was not ready to reduce God to unreality by making it a product of Maya and ignorance. He puts that God is real so far as creation is real and God is as aspect of the Absolute. He recognizes God as the perfect as well as the highest moral being, free from all sorts of evils. According to him, God acts His act as per His own laws. Here, it is to be mentioned that unlike Vivekananda, Radhakrishnan regards the world as just an accident of the Absolute. In similar voice with Sankara, Radhakrishnan too kept belief that the world is not necessary to Brahman. He borrowed this element from ancient Indian thought. He also believed that creation is nothing but Lila and this Lila is real.

According to him, the spirit in man is life and it restricts death in all its forms. "A man's religion must be his own and not simply accepted on trust or imposed by authority."⁴ He may be put on the way by trust and authority, but it is his self-dependent search that will certainly take him to the goal. The object of man's religious experience is God or the ultimate reality. Radhakrishnan said that the ultimate sense of God might not be known by us though man may unveil something regarding God through religious experience. The belief of man in God is like the hypothesis of electron of the physicist. Radhakrishnan puts, "we have certain experiences which we try to account for by the assumption of God. The God of our imagination may be as real as the electron but it is not necessarily the reality which we immediately apprehend."⁵ To Radhakrishnan, the idea of God is an interpretation of experience. According to him, religious consciousness exhibits the indistinguishable relation between God and religion. He depicts God as a symbol where religion cognizes the Absolute.

Vivekananda interprets that the Hindu concept of religion is that reasoning cannot validate religious truth. In as much as religious facts are based on experience, only experience can validate them. The laws that govern the spiritual world, the moral and spiritual relationship between soul and soul and between individual and God are eternal. In this manner, the Hindus have received their religion through experience, and Hinduism possesses no struggle and attempts to keep belief in a certain doctrine or dogma. The goal of Hinduism, according to Vivekananda, is realization through constant endeavour to become perfect, to become divine, to reach and see God and to become perfect like God.

Vivekananda exhibits religious tolerance as the key point for religious life. Explaining the ideal in respect of religion, he says, "I accept all religions that were in the past and worship with them all. I worship God with everything of them. The Bible, the Vedas, the Koran and all other sacred books are but so many pages and an infinite number of pages remain yet to be unfolded."⁶ The advaita Vedanta was accepted by Vivekananda and yet, he himself engaged in social activities like famine relief, maintenance of orphanages, opening of training centres, educational institutions, dispensaries and the so on. The exploitation of the low caste in the guise of caste system was strongly opposed by Vivekananda. People were advised by him for inter marriages between various castes for peaceful co-existence maintaining mutual respects in the society. It is to be noted here that the unity of all religions was not simply intellectually convinced by Vivekananda; rather he experienced it and lived through.

Vivekananda regards Hindu philosophy and religion so broadly and rationally that it embraces every idea of God and human spirituality. This is another significant point of uniqueness in the

religious philosophy of Vivekananda. We have seen that he, like the classical thinkers, has reconciled philosophy with religion. Here, of course, he differs from the concept of philosophy and religion advocated by Hegel. According to him, every culture is the struggling expression of the 'Reality'. Of course, Hegel in similar tune with Ramakrishna conveys the approach that religion exists in faith. Ramakrishna reveals that merely faith can make us realize God within us. Vivekananda with utmost belief in religion asserts that Hinduism is based on the Vedas, the repository of spiritual laws discovered by different persons at different times. As a great spiritualistic philosopher, Vivekananda disagrees with naturalism which approves matter as the ultimate reality. He advocates that the naturalistic explanation of nature becomes inadequate without explanation of what is spiritualism. He with agony in mind comments that the greatest blunder of the modern society is to realize the spirit to be matter. Because, to Vivekananda, the spirit, the cause of all our thoughts and actions remains untouched by what is good or bad.

Another merit of the religious philosophy of Vivekananda may be the attempt at making union between science and religion. According to Vivekananda, there is no real fight between science and religion as he urges that religion should be justified by modern science. The religious approach of Vivekananda is supernaturalism where he finds his spiritual Guru Ramakrishna never inspired sectarian and orthodox Hindu religion. The greatest message of Vivekananda in the context of spiritualism is to overcome the limits of the so-called 'established religion or cultural tradition'. To understand true nature of religion, according to Vivekananda, is man should study the original sources of knowledge. In this respect, he prefers shraddha (respect) to achieve remarkable consequences regarding religious discourses. In accordance with Vivekananda, each and every creed, thus, attempts at humanity with a view to realizing the infinity of himself. It is to be noted that Vivekananda and Dr. S. Radhakrishnan undertook hard work to establish that the essential of religion is to become aware of spiritual divinity. The significant contribution of Vivekananda is the comprehensive acknowledgement of every aspect of life. He desired to discard the very distinctions regarding creed, culture, sex, race and nationality through his unique notion of universal religion. The Vedanta philosophy of 'oneness' has been successfully put into practice by the great Master which reflects positively in the mind of Vivekananda. As an essentialist, he incorporates 'unity in diversity' as the law of every progress. He has regarded religion as synonymous with universalism in respect of the spirit. The harmonious balance in respect of our directions achieved by 'Yoga' is his most distinctive message of ideal of religion. Thus, he has focused the point that Advaita is the future religion to enlighten humanity.

Conclusion: Dr. S. Radhakrishnan may certainly be treated as one of the greatest religious philosophers of the contemporary world. His philosophy is spiritualistic in nature and character. Spiritualism is a religious attitude of the world. Radhakrishnan is not a theoretician of religion. He is not a philosopher who looks at it from outside with disinterested curiosity; rather he enters into it from within as a committed believer of true religion that is born of spirit, not of flesh and blood, not of codes and customs, not of races and nations.

The monistic trend of the Vedanta philosophy has been prescribed by Vivekananda as the way of realizing the end of religious pursuit of truth. According to him, religion should be treated as a vision and encouragement of the Reality, the very destined goal of all men. The best gift presented by Vivekananda towards the world is his agreement that Vedanta philosophy exists in realization. The relevance of such a thinking of Vivekananda has become an important issue of discussion in contemporary religious trend of thinking as it offers its substance to religion. In accordance with him, realization indicates that every truth should be justified by us with appropriate reason. The

secret of Vivekananda's Vedanta philosophy may be termed the realization of the Atman to be spirit.

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