



Research Paper

A Comparative Discussion of the Religious Approaches of Swami Vivekananda and Krishna Chandra Bhattacharya

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Abstract

Vivekananda says that the approaches of 'exclusive right to live' of various religions of the world give birth to violence. According to him, religions are not contradictory, rather supplementary to each other though they are divergent in different aspects. Religion, for him, is nothing but the realization of divinity within us and says that the chief objective of all religions is to realize such divinity and this realization is the one universal religion. Therefore, the key concept of Vivekananda in respect of religion is 'to love man is to love God', or 'service to man is service to God'.

Krishna Chandra Bhattacharya, a noted Indian Philosopher of present age, is noted for his phenomenological persuasion and pithy, analytical style of writing. Bhattacharya, like the author of the Vedanta Paribhasa, adopts the Nyaya method of exposition for the Vedantic thesis. In attaching importance to the mode of knowing or awareness of anything, Bhattacharya goes a long way with Kant. He argues this awareness to be alternately tripartite: cognitive, conative and affective. According to him, the absolute can have alternative formulations or symbolisms. According to Bhattacharya, advaita is the religion of jnana. But he is completely evasive about the relation of the religion of jnana with Vedic and post-Vedic worship and ceremonial. The truth is that he refers to the historical evolution of Hinduism.

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I. INTRODUCTION:

Vivekananda comments that the real truth regarding any domain of knowledge will not contradict itself. Knowledge that comes from within can overcome each and every hurdle. Religion should be justified by the discoveries of reason. According to him, religion deals with the subtle realm of the mind where one can see the universe. From this perspective, Vivekananda terms religion an extension of science. To him, religious inquiry is a science in its own right by following the internal path appropriate to its own field. It again tests its finding by reason and verifies its reasoning by experience. Like any physical science, religion too moves toward broader generalization, unless and until it becomes an all-embracing principle.

The religious philosophy of Dr. Krishna Chandra Bhattacharya is spiritualistic in nature and character. According to Dr. Bhattacharya, religion is the way of attaining the very path of realizing the non-difference between the self and the ultimate reality, the Brahman. To him, everyman should attempt at knowing the true nature and knowledge regarding this reality, i.e. latent in one's within. He has taken into consideration the various modes of experience involving object, self-subsistent, pure subjective experience and the transcendental that is neither subjective nor objective. This progressive internalization took him to arrive at the conception of his absolute.

A Comparative Discussion of the Religious Approaches of Swami Vivekananda and Krishna Chandra Bhattacharya:

Vivekananda reconciles science and Advaita Vedanta as they possess the common fundamental principle of knowledge. This, in fact, discards nothing but enhances the quality of everything. In this way, he insists that Advaita, the non-duality, the oneness, the idea of the impersonal God, is the only religion. According to Vivekananda, art, science and religion are but three different ways of expressing a single truth.

All religions of the world claim that there is a unity within us. But Vivekananda guards us against this unity in each and every religion. He says that there cannot have further progress by being one with divinity. If religion finds this perfect unity, science of religion can't further make progress. According to him, advancement comes merely out of diversity. Creation will be destroyed if diversity stops. Religious sects are multiplying because of variations of thoughts. In accordance with Vivekananda, it is 'Unity in Variety'... the sign of progress in religion. Contradiction to him comes from the same truth that adopts itself towards the changing situations of various natures. These little variations have been essential for adaptation. Of course, the same truth expresses in the heart of everything.

Vivekananda says that real religion rises above mythology. The foundation of religion has really been made strong by modern science. The whole universe can be demonstrated into one. The being of the metaphysician and the matter of the physicist are just one. As for example, the atom is invisible, unthinkable and the cause of everything. Similarly, the potency of the universe, for the Vedantist, depends on the Atman. Therefore, no real fight is there between modern science and Vedanta, both regards a self-evolving cause. The comprehensive study of religion must not aim at finding perfect unity amongst different religious practices. Merely scientific undertaking needs to look at the facts from objective standpoint, free from business and prejudice. 'Truth alone triumphs, not untruth. Through truth alone is opened the way to God. One should not care for a moment who joins hands with him or not. One must be sure that he touches the hand of the Lord. To deal with religion objectively is to describe and interpret the inner events and meanings without prejudice and with sympathetic understanding. The study of religion is a science, which requires a sensitive and artistic heart'.¹

K. C. Bhattacharya has considered knowledge, feeling and willing as the three basis of his formulation of the Absolute where he is unable to realize the very existence of the agency or subject that knows, feels or wills. Sri Ramana Maharshi's method of enquiry of source that knows or wills or feels will enable one to understand the deficiency involved in Bhattacharya's conception of the absolute. K. C. Bhattacharya has been forced by the analysis of three states waking, dream and deep sleep to accept subject-object dualism as long as there is a sense of individuality and the transcendence of the same as the technique in the investigation of the nature of the Absolute.

Bhattacharya's aim of the religious thinking is the understanding the nature of unification of the soul and the supreme soul, i.e. the highest Self. If the Absolute is able to alternate, it is subjected to change or limitations, it must be finite hence, cannot be the Absolute. Bhattacharya accepts the requirement of the transcendence of subject-object duality in the Ultimate Reality. There is no possibility of transcendence where there is duality of any form.

Bhattacharya, in 'subject as Freedom', starts with the consideration of one's body as the subject of perception of the external objects. In the higher stages, he deals with felt-body, psychic subjectivity along with its image and thought, and spiritual subjectivity with its feeling and introspection. Lastly, he comes to the conclusion that the introspective subject is free from objectivity and is freedom itself. The transcendence of subject and object is considered by Bhattacharya as the goal. His belief is that the gradual liberation from objectivity and the consequent subjectivity leads one to freedom. It is here to be noted that Bhattacharya has not considered the possibility of such a freedom in the deep-sleep state.

The psychological and epistemological interpretations have dominated the spiritual philosophy and religious thinking of Bhattacharya. A critical analysis reflects clearly the limitations and the consequent unsatisfactoriness of such reasoning. The influence of Advaita Vedanta in Bhattacharya's philosophy is pointed out by the emphasis on transcendence of the subject-object duality. The notion of object is in contrast with the subject as self-evident content of spiritual consciousness. The object is understood as self-subsistent before fact is understood as object. The contrast between logic and metaphysics suggests the difference between the self-subsistent and the real. This suggestion is verified in the 'enjoying' consciousness of a content 'I' as symbolized by a contemplated meaning 'am'. This 'enjoying' understanding is introspection. Its content is understood as what object is not, as speaking subjectivity. First, the object is accepted as a shadow or symbol of 'I'; in the second, 'I' and the other person are contradictorily the symbol of the other; and in the third case, there is a consciousness of the over personal reality as symbolized by 'I'. This consciousness of being, to K. C. Bhattacharya, is the religious experience and its theoretic form is philosophy of religion. In accordance with K. C. Bhattacharya, the Absolute can be revealed merely by the negation of 'I'. The Absolute can be expressed, even as 'Absolute is', since 'Is' indicates truth and not reality.

In the realm of philosophy, the thinking of K. C. Bhattacharya has been turned to be peculiar in nature since his writings were brief, precise and full of meaning. Spiritualism has been treated as the very essence of his religious philosophy. It is to be noted here that spiritualism has been a very dominant trend in the religious speculation in contemporary India. Bhattacharya kept belief in the very existence of the spirit which is permanent. It is very hard to yield an account of his philosophy in terms of any accepted philosophical model. Yet an approximate explanation of his philosophy can be given by calling it the philosophy of Transcendental

'Idealism'. He asserts that his idealism is not in the sense of 'idea-ism'; it doesn't want to suggest that the reality is an idea. It's idealism in the sense of 'ideal-ism'. For K. C. Bhattacharya, the ultimate reality that one is to achieve through one's religious exercise is apprehended as the end of the process of realization. The thinking of Bhattacharya can be called transcendental, for the nature of the ultimate is not describable in terms of any accepted philosophical epithets. Bhattacharya relates everything to experience and reality is comprehended as the ultimate presupposition of experience. It is neither subjective nor objective; to relate the subject and object in knowledge it is very important that the relating principle is neither subjective nor objective. Hence, Bhattacharya conceives the ultimate reality as transcending the distinction between the subject and the object. For this reason, philosophy of Bhattacharya is named 'transcendental'. On the other sense, his philosophy can be called the philosophy of Abstract Idealism too. His ultimate reality is very much abstract though the same is not completely similar to the substance of Spinoza or to the Brahman of Advaita Vedanta.

The concept of philosophy of Bhattacharya is similar to Immanuel Kant, or even to that of Logical Positivists. Bhattacharya, like these philosophers, too believes that it is not an essential function of philosophy to construct a synthetic view of the world. He realizes that the judgments of philosophy aren't factual; these judgments are not concerned with facts like the empirical judgment. According to Bhattacharya, "It is the theoretical inadequacy of its approach to the object....it is the irrationality of our beliefs in the ultimate truths of matters of facts that leads to the more rational belief in the pure object, or the self-subsistent."²

The concept of philosophy of Bhattacharya is a high spiritualistic investigation within and that particular exercise can be said to be religious in nature and behaviour. He searches for a pure Self that transcends both the subjective as well as objective existents. From this analysis, it follows that religion is an intrinsic practice to understand the true nature of the Self which is beyond the subject-object co-relation. This is the key to his religious tendencies in his philosophical speculations. In his investigation for self-awareness, the subject starts by relating itself to the object. That relation has to be avoided. That process is nothing but only to stress on the difference between the two--merely to impel the subject to disassociate itself from the object. Even so, this primary act to the realization of subjectivity involves a negative relation with the objectivity. As and when the subject realizes its difference from the object, it finds its way to the realization of complete subjectivity. In this context, Bhattacharya asserts that the sense of the subject lies in freeing itself from the object, and that sense of the object is that where from the subject frees itself.

Swami Vivekananda, the great lover of Vedanta philosophy, preached monism or Advaita Vedanta by his personal example. He thereby showed his tolerance towards each and every religion. For the world unity and to believe in shapeless God, Vivekananda took recourse to the message of Vedanta. He highlighted that in broad sense, religion consists of ideas, aims, activities and experiences of human beings that pass from generation to generation. Religion can rightly be said to be the most important power, moulding and regulating human lives. According to Vivekananda, if we make a detailed survey of human experiences, we will detect that religion has occupied an important role in life and history of human civilization from the earliest times and throughout the ages. But religion in ancient time consisted of some crude, superstitious and miraculous beliefs used in a very narrow sense. Religion is not free from all kinds of superstitions instead of its development in recent times.

Vivekananda was the spiritual emancipator of India. The Indian philosophical traditions especially Vedanta inspired him. He, on the basis of this, presented a new design for life: a model contentment, compassion, balance, and harmony. He accepted religion as one of the most important aspects of human life. Vivekananda endeavoured to base a religion on the rational ground by accepting reason as the final guide even in the field of religion and the aim of religion as realization. One of the most important points regarding him is that he conducted and participated in religious conferences. His religious ideas suggest some new ideas and could throw new light on religious concepts.

According to Vivekananda, religion is not theoretical but can be applied in daily life. A practical demonstration of Advaita in real life has been given by Vivekananda. The unique trend of his philosophy is that religion is brought down from the whimsical heights to the midst of the masses. His formation of a new ideal of universal religion and one religion can be called universal love or universal brotherhood. It has given an equal value for all the religions of the world. His identification of truth was absolute and scientific, and he showed that religion can be practiced by everyone. He made all understand that it is not necessary to have a vast literary knowledge, but the practice—that is very much required. So, it can be applied to all nations, all societies, and individuals. It is the religious harmony and the best solution for the existing conflicts among the world religions is the awareness that all religions are essentially one and same.

According to Vivekananda, religion, a question of fact and not of just talk, is in fact realization which he desired to establish. He said that religion means to express this inherent divinity. Uttering religion a 'matter of fact', he said that we have to understand our own souls and realize what is there. This is religion. Mere talk and discussion will not make religion. Vivekananda believed that God, the common factor of all religions, is existent in our heart. Our intellect, reason and arguments will do nothing in this regard. Merely our realization and direct perception will pursue the goal. In this context, Vivekananda said, "Give up what is evil and give up

what is good. What remains then? Behind good and evil stands something which is yours, the real you, beyond every evil, and beyond every good too, and it is that which is manifesting itself as good and bad.”³ To him, this is real ‘I’, the self, the real manifestation of God and knowing myself is knowing God which is the core of religion.

Vivekananda realized that the ideal of universal religion can give shelter to each and every individual, it is also capable of satisfying every religious sect and it possesses the power of super shading the conflicts of various sects. He declared such a religion already exists and it is none but the broad-minded and open-hearted Hindu religion. Speaking about Hinduism, Vivekananda, in the parliament of religion, explained its spiritual nature and uttered knowing and becoming God is its whole object. He said, “The Hindus do not want to live upon words and theories. If there is existence beyond the ordinary sensuous existence, he wants to come face to face with them”⁴ He further said, “The Hindu religion does not consist in struggles and attempts to believe a certain doctrine or dogma, but in realizing-not in believing, but in being and becoming.”⁵ He said that unity in diversity is the plan of nature and the Hindu merely recognized it.

II. CONCLUSION:

Vivekananda desired to establish a bright sun of intellectuality joined with the heart of Buddha, the wonderful, infinite heart of love and mercy. He kept belief that we will have the highest philosophy through this union. To him, science and religion will meet and shake hands if this really happens. One will have poetry and philosophy as friends and that will be the future religion. Vivekananda asserts if it can be worked out, it is sure and certain that it will be for all times and people. He uttered, “A tremendous stream is flowing towards the ocean carrying us all along with it; and though like straws and scraps of paper we may at times float aimlessly about, in the long run we are sure to join the Ocean of Life and Bliss.”⁶ To K. C. Bhattacharya, realization of self is regarded as something sacred in every religion, and in this respect, Vedanta is primarily religion. Advaita recognizes self-knowledge to be sacred knowledge, knowledge *par excellence*. As a religion advaita takes into account both the individual and the universal. Advaita, as a religion, stands for deepening of one’s spiritual individuality while simultaneously it supports the salvation of all. It has been named by Bhattacharya ‘inwardization of one’s subjective being’. It is universal in the sense that advaita philosophically presents a truth that is for all. Advaita guarantees God and salvation to all finite beings, human, sub-human and celestial. Advaita has been a religion of harmony and hospitality. Bhattacharya phrases “Advaitism” as the religion of advaita that conserves one’s spiritual individuality and it equally recognizes spiritual individuality in others too. The concept of *svadharma* has been interpreted by Bhattacharya as spiritual individuality. Religious life, as Bhattacharya explains it, is to be led within windowless monads. According to him, religion is coextensive with society and its institutions. But there may have various religions in a society. He doesn’t seem to favour the possibility of inter-religious dialogue.

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