



The role of religion in Indian Life: From Swamiji's viewpoint by- Swami Prabhananda

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Abstract

In his book 'East and West,' Swamiji examines the distinctive attributes of ancient civilisations and their quest for values and objectives. He contends that religion constitutes the essence of a nation, directing its political, social, and spiritual existence. Swamiji underscores the significance of self-realization and the aspiration to liberate oneself from the constraints of religion within Indian society. He contends that religion is an endeavour aimed at attaining happiness both in the present and the afterlife, asserting that one must be liberated from the constraints of nature and the corporeal form. Swamiji underscores the significance of religion in India's history, contemporary context, and future, asserting that it is the foundation of all Indian knowledge, wisdom, and inspiration. He contends that religion is not the root cause of India's decline, but rather the absence of authentic faith. Through the stimulation of religious consciousness, Swamiji revitalised the core of the dormant nation and instilled self-confidence and self-esteem within the populace.

Swamiji has raised Dharma to the realm of Dharma-Vijnana and introduced Sarvabagahi Vedanta Dharma, which is accessible to all, irrespective of their geographical location. This comprehensive religion enables individuals to go from illusion to reality and recognise the Universal Self. Swamiji's Vedantism underscores the significance of diverse forms of worship, endeavour, and creativity in the pursuit of truth. He contends that the service of humanity and the worship of the divine are synonymous, asserting that there is no distinction between human existence and faith. Swamiji identified a robust basis for ethics within Advaita philosophy, grounding ethics in non-duality and rendering it comprehensible and acceptable to Indians. He imparted a novel and profound relevance to Western Humanism inside Indian thinking, amalgamating wisdom and masculinity. His affection for humanity is infused with a sense of unity among all entities, and his blend of wisdom and masculinity has reconciled the divide between the mortal and immortal realms, resulting in a remarkable fusion of folklore and spirituality.

Keywords: India, religion, Swamiji, vedanta, universal self. ethics

Introduction

This paper is an English translation of the original Bengali article entitled *Bharatia jibone dharmer Bhumika: Swamijir dristite (The Role of Religion in Indian Life: from Swamiji's Viewpoint)*, written by Swami Prabhananda and originally published in *Dhruvajyoti Tumi Andhakare*, Edited by Pravrajika Vedantaprana and published by Pravrajika Amalprana in 2014. The translation has been prepared by me with the intent of making the valuable insights and arguments of the original work accessible to English-speaking scholars and readers.

While every effort has been made to retain the philosophical depth and clarity of the original text, a few minor clarifications have been added where necessary to aid understanding. I acknowledge the full intellectual authorship of the original paper to Swami Prabhananda. My role in this work is limited to that of a translator.

Material and Methods

The primary material selected for this research is a Bengali article entitled *Bharatia jibone dharmer Bhumika: Swamijir dristite (The Role of Religion in Indian Life: from Swamiji's Viewpoint)*, authored by Swami Prabhananda. The article was chosen based on its cultural significance, and potential for interpretative translation. Supplementary materials include: Bengali-English bilingual dictionaries. This study adopts a qualitative, interpretive approach grounded in translation studies.

The following methodological steps were followed: The Bengali article was read multiple times to identify its central themes, rhetorical tone, and stylistic features. Special

attention was paid to cultural idioms, metaphors, and embedded philosophical ideas. Challenging words, idiomatic expressions, and culturally specific references were identified and examined. Their English equivalents were selected based on context, not literal meaning. The translated text was reviewed by two bilingual experts familiar with Bengali literature.

This method ensured both linguistic precision and cultural sensitivity, aiming to preserve the integrity of the original text while making it accessible and meaningful to English-speaking audiences.

Discussion

Just as the nations of the world are united and common to each other in some respects, each ancient nation has a certain personality, some unique characteristics in the life of each nation, among which the spirit of the nation's potential and achievement is the most vivid. As in the life of the individual, so in the life of every nation there is a *Weltanschauung*—the main melody of its life music; the other melodies harmonize with it. It is with this ideal and purpose that the natural life force guides the national life and gives identity to the nation. It is in the pursuit of these ideals and objectives that the construction of national culture is built.

In his book 'East and West,' Swamiji writes, 'Where is the soul of this demon? the answer is religion. The nation is still alive because no one has been able to destroy it... Does the river that has come down thousand crosses from the mountain go back to the mountain or not? If you try to go alone, here and there will spread and die; that is all. Whether

that river goes to the sea two days before or after, through two good places, or once or twice, it breaks the ice. If this ten thousand year of national life has been wrong, there is no way now; if a new character is created, then it will die ^[1]. Comparing French and English, Swamiji writes, 'Political freedom is the backbone of the character of the French nation... English in character— business minded, they are good in exchange. The judicial approach also the real meaning of English... The Hindu says that political and social freedom is a good thing, but the real thing is spiritual freedom— 'mukti'. This is the purpose of national life; the Vedic, the Jain, the Buddhist, the Advaita, the Vishishtadvaita or the Dvaita all agree there ^[2].

Assessing the depth and the influence of religion in Indian culture, Swamiji said, 'And you will see that the soul of this country is religion, the language is religion, the feeling is religion; and your politics, social policy, sweep the roads, curing the plague, giving food to the famine victims will always be what has happened in this country ^[3]. What's the religion here? Human beings are always free and pure by nature. People are trying knowingly and unknowingly for this realization. This realization of self is liberation; this liberation is the eternal goal of man. There is a common aspiration among people to achieve this goal. In order to satisfy this hunger, religion transports people to the goal of self-realization. The ultimate goal of all religions is self-realization—self-realization beyond all scriptures, beliefs, rituals, and practices. This is self-awareness. At the core of Swamiji's own life and words is also a sense of self-realization and a vision of the world and life. He saw a desire to break free from the bondage prevailing in Indian culture.

Again, by using the word dharma from the point of view of the Mimamsakas, Swamiji has shown the importance of salvation in India and dharma in the West. Here, religion is: "That which gives pleasure in this world or pleasure in the next. Religion is an activity. Religion is searching for people day and night for happiness. What is Moksha? It teaches that the happiness of this world is the same as that of the Hereafter. Beyond the laws of nature, there is neither this world nor the Hereafter; instead, it is slavery—iron chains and gold chains those all are same. Therefore, one has to be free; one has to go out of the bondage of nature; one has to go out of the bondage of the body; there should be no slavery. This is the concept that makes India unique in the world ^[4].

In addition, one of the characteristics of Indian society is that they made an adjustment of dharma and moksha. For this reason, along with Yudhishtira, Arjuna, Duryodhana, Bhishma, Karna, and others, Vyasa, Suka, and Janaka were also seen in India. In order to establish the true Indian ideal, Swamiji exhorted most of the countrymen: "Manifest the heroic Vasundhara spirit, manifest the principle of Sama-daana-bheda-danda, enjoy the world, but be righteous. And if you live a life of hatred in silence, you will suffer hell in this world as well as in the Hereafter. It's like the Scripture. It's not any different ^[5] The main ideology of Hinduism, the caste religion or Swadharma based on the Varnashrama mentioned in the Gita, has shown the way for the progress and welfare of the individual and society.

Referring to the influence of religion in Indian Life, Rabindranath Tagore wrote: "The life of the hands, the life of the feet, the life of the head... are no different - the religion of faith, the religion of conduct, the religion of

Sunday, the religion of the other six days, the religion of the church, and the religion of the home they do not divide India. The religion of India is the religion of the whole society; its root is in the soil, and its head is in the sky. India has always regarded religion as the most important factor in the life of man ^[6]. India's past, present, and future are bound together by the unity of religion. By adopting this Dharmasutra, the intellect, faith, and behaviour of the people of India are being regularized. Hope is being driven. Religion is not the cause of India's downfall. The lack of true religion is the cause of India's misery. Religion doesn't make people weak. Strength and courage are religions; charity is a religion, love for others is religion, freedom of the soul is religion, and faith in God and one's own self is religion. It is the source of all Indian knowledge and wisdom. This religion is the source of inspiration for Indian knowledge, science, literature, and art. By awakening this religious consciousness, which is the life spring of Indian culture, Swamiji awakened the essence of the sleeping nation, brought back the self-confidence of the disillusioned countrymen, and established self-confidence and self-esteem in the minds of the people. The misery that has appeared from time to time in the social and political life of India is due to the lack of true religion, the lack of proper application of religion, and, in a word, the purposeful misuse of religion. In order to remove that deficiency, Swamiji has elevated Dharma to the status of Dharma-Vijnana and presented all-seizing (*sarvabagahi*) Vedanta Dharma. Vedanta is a treasure indeed. "The Vedanta is a huge ocean on which a warship and a raft can sail side by side. In this ocean of Vedanta, a true yogi can co-exist with a pagan or even an atheist. Not only this, in the ocean of Vedanta, Hindus, Muslims, Christians, and Parsis—all are children of Almighty God ^[7]. By professing this all-embracing religion, man does not pass from illusion to truth, but from truth to a higher truth. From the lowest materialism to non-dualism, the purpose of sadhana is the manifold efforts of the human soul to realize the Universal Self. This religion is for everyone, no matter where they live. There is a place for Brahmins, Chandals, the rich and poor, men and women—a message of hope for everyone, a bright future for everyone.

In reality, the essence of this religion—Vedanta consciousness, in the Swamiji's words—was restricted to a handful of people, cut off from the masses, and took its place in a tapovan (ashram) in the corner of a forest. Swamiji brought Vedanta from the forest to everyone's house. He clearly showed that this religious life is the real identity of the people of India. All the hopes and aspirations of the people of India can be fulfilled only in this religious life. In fact, this *dharma-bhava* is resonating in the thoughts, knowledge, and deeds of the people of India. Sister Nivedita discovered a new significance in the Vedantism propagated by Swamiji. She wrote, "Many and one—if indeed there is only one being, then not only all modes of worship, but equally all modes of action—all forms of effort, all forms of creation—are the means of attaining truth. There can be no distinction between the spiritual and the material. Prayer is to work hard; renunciation is to win; the whole life is an act of dharma. Yoga and well-being (*khem*) are our responsibility as renunciation. It is this realization that has made Vivekananda the great preacher of action (*karma*), but this action (*karma*) is not separate from knowledge and devotion; rather, it is a publisher of those. To him, the

factory and the reading room, the farm and the field, are as true as the saint's hut and the temple gate, and are as appropriate a place for the union of God with man. For him, there is no difference between the service of man and the worship of God; for him, there is no difference between manhood and faith, between righteousness and spirituality. On the one hand, all his words seem to be the expression of this main conviction^[8]. This infinite omniscience of Vedanta has opened all the doors of human progress. With this door, the soul of India is ready to accept the new welfare ideas of the country and abroad.

Another great contribution of Swamiji in the field of religion and philosophy is the discovery of a solid foundation for ethics as much as for theology. Even 'Bharatapathika' Rammohan saw the extreme superiority of theology in Advaita Vedanta on the basis of scriptures and logic, but sought refuge in the New Testament for superior ethics. There is no doubt that Rammohun's genius failed in this regard. Many reformers have failed. Exploring the reasons for this, Swamiji says, "Very few of them have studied and discussed their own religion well, and not one of them has gone through the sadhana required to understand the 'mother of all religions'! I believe that God has solved this problem^[9]. One of the manifestations of the clear recognition of his convictions is the establishment of a sound philosophical basis for ethics. In the light of Indian wisdom, he discovered the foundation of ethics in Advaita philosophy. He said in the *Kumbhakonam* discourse, "The one infinite truth is present in you, in me—in the soul of all of us; what else can be the traditional basis of ethics other than the eternal infinite Spirituality? The eternal unity of the soul is the basis of all principles^[10]. Thus, by establishing ethics on non-duality, ethics not only stands on a solid scientific foundation beyond dispute, but also becomes easily understandable and acceptable to the people of India as followers of traditional ideas. In his lecture on 'Vedanta' in Lahore, Swamiji said, "Every religion preaches that the essence of all ethics is the welfare of others. Why should I blame others? All religions teach us to be selfless. Why be selfless? Learn about non-violence... You are in the ignorant, you are in the wise, you are in the weak, you are in the strong. Be aware of this theory and be sympathetic to everyone... non-dualism is the only basis, the only explanation of ethics. Other doctrines can teach you morals, but they cannot give you a reason why you should be morally upright^[11]. This philosophical foundation of ethics has given a strong basis to the teaching of values.

In light of this philosophy based on non-dualism, Swamiji has made another valuable contribution: to give new and deeper significance to Western Humanism in Indian thought. At one time, Vivekananda, who was greedy for emancipation and later imbued with the spirit of Ramakrishna, loved the arts, the afflicted, and the poor as much as anyone else. His love is for all those who are surrounded by ignorance. But I feel a lot of love for the people I love. His love for humanity is pure^[12]. His love for mankind is imbued with a spirit of oneness in all things. Swami Vivekananda said, "Above all, I believe in my God the wicked, my God the miserable, my God the poor of all races."

Reflecting on the significance of the eternal monk's deep human love for humanity, Mohitlal writes, "Perhaps this novel form of human greatness is the ultimate expression of the deepest theory of the last and greatest gift of this age—

Humanism. This form of it cannot be grasped by the intellect, but only by a sort of mystic consciousness^[13].

Conclusion

Although this theory is old, we are understandably enthralled by Sri Ramakrishna's Bani Mantra, enthused by Vivekananda's combination of wisdom and manliness. Although it is old, this eternal theory has bridged the gap between the mortal world and the immortal world and has created a wonderful combination of folk and spirituality. With this combination, a great power has emerged; the horizon of a new era has opened. Vivekananda said, "Everything seems to me to lie in manliness. This is my new gospel." He paid the best tribute to *Naranarayan* by instilling the spirit of *Narayan* (God) in the oppressed *Nar* (Human being). He called for and guided the perfection of present life by the development of the inherent God-consciousness of man. Salute to sage Vivekananda.

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