

## **Revisiting Sri Aurobindo and Swami Vivekananda's Concept of Religion**

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### **Abstract**

This paper discusses Sri Aurobindo and Vivekananda's concept of Religion. It revisits the way of projecting Aurobindo's two senses of Swaraj and Vivekananda's notion of Yoga. Aurobindo discusses political and spiritual senses of Swaraj. Swaraj means Self-rule. These two senses of Swaraj help in understanding the concept of Religion. His concept of religion leads towards Integral Unity. Swami Vivekananda's concept of Religion can be attained through the way of self-realization and practising Yoga. Practising Yoga helps in attaining Divinity. Further, in this paper, various similarities and differences that exist between them along with the relevance of Sri Aurobindo and Vivekananda on religion in today's world is also discussed.

*Keywords: Sri Aurobindo, Swami Vivekananda, Concept of Religion, Yoga and Swaraj*

### **Sri Aurobindo's Philosophy of Religion**

Sri Aurobindo is regarded as a Contemporary Indian Philosopher. He tried to make an attempt to synthesize Eastern and Western Cultures. He worked in the freedom struggle of India and focussed on the Swadeshi movement. He talked about a responsible constitutional and popular system of government in India that is entirely free from alien control. He gave stress on full political freedom from alienations. He also worked for the betterment of the economic life of individuals. He was a spiritual leader also. He had a basic concept about God and Soul, read Upanishads and the Gita, and also had a powerful religious experience. His spiritual philosophy talked about the realization of the silent, space-less, timeless, dynamic Brahman.

He was considered a path-breaking politician whose only motto was the advancement of India and Indians. He was the first person who undertook the task of discovering that there is a relationship between spirituality and political thought. Through social-political doctrine,

we are able to see the combination of spirituality with politics. We can take Swaraj as an example. Swaraj has two senses i.e. political and spiritual. His spiritual sense of Swaraj enables the individual life to turn into the Divine Life. Swaraj is regarded as an important notion in his political career.

Swaraj literally means Self-rule. It stands for individual and group. It means rule by an individual and rule by a group. He used Swaraj in democracy sense. According to Aurobindo, the demand for Self-government is essential for making India free from political bondage. The establishment of self-government seemed mandatory because it completely liberates India from the dominative British rule.

Swaraj is also taken in the sense of Spiritual Union with the Divine. His political sense of Swaraj is regarded as a possible pathway of attaining this spiritual sense of Swaraj. In the spiritual sense of Swaraj, a union of individuals with the Divine takes place.

Through his political doctrine, we are able to get acquainted with the concept of the nation-state. This nation-state is regarded as a necessary stage for the development of human unity. Human unity can be achieved through the inner process of growth of the human race which can be both mental and ethical in nature. Swaraj's two senses reconcile all religious differences in human life and help us to attain collective salvation instead of individual salvation for the betterment of society.

Swaraj is regarded as the gateway to make Life Divine. Religion can spring from the inner law of human advancement. An inner force that gives rise to interconnection and interaction between the human races builds strong human unity. But in every religion essence of spiritual truth is inherent which needs to be realized. Religious practices of various religions must have the higher objective of discovering divinity in oneself.

According to Aurobindo, religion has to be lived and not be learned as a creed. Religious life is considered an engaging life. According to Aurobindo, if spirituality is forgotten from the essence of religion then we lead towards a mass of superstition, mystical nonsense, and try to invent the notion of universal religion. Religion is seen as a particular system of beliefs, faiths, and worship of a God who has the power of controlling the universe and natural phenomena. Any religion incorporates these five features such as belief in divinity, reverence for the founders of the religion, the sacred status of scriptures, sanctity attached to certain places, and the role of rituals, prayer, etc. He recognizes the intuitional aspect of the Vedas and the Upanisads.

He said that the Vedic message which talks of Mayavada is because of the manipulation of the medieval thinkers and that is why Indians are aloof from the thinking of

social-political reconstruction and national organization. He proposes integral philosophy in which both reality of the world and spiritual basis for the social-political engagement has been affirmed. His philosophy unites the mystical approach of ancient Indians with the evolutionary context of the West. His spirituality aspect talks about perfect unity that exists between pure energy and pure existence along with indivisible unity that is found between them. The development of spiritualistic understanding of reality among individuals is very important. He said that it is the unity only that prevails every aspect of reality. Mind and body are regarded as manifestation of the same energy. The essential objective of human life is to realize this integral unity.

The realization of Integral unity is possible only through the realization of our own nature. The present state of our mind and body are regarded as imperfect instrumentation of the Spirit. This spirit needs to be transformed into Supramental truth consciousness. This transformation is essential for the construction of a harmonious society. The ordinary mind creates dichotomies, but the Supramental transformation leads to the state of harmony constructively. His integral philosophy provides a balance between the dichotomy of spiritualism and materialism. According to him, the supreme reality pervades the highest form of manifestation. He talks about various grades of reality such as Pure Existence, Consciousness- Force, Supermind, Mind, Psyche, Life and Matter.

Pure existence which is regarded as the unknowable reality is discovered only in an egoless dispassionate sense. In order to know pure existence, we need the principle of consciousness which is termed as a consciousness force. The conscious pure existence is regarded as blissful. Matter evolves into higher forms such as Life and Psyche because it has the power of creative energy. Supermind is considered as the principle which talks about reality and egoistic mental capacity.

According to Aurobindo, the mind has the inherent ability to rise towards the higher sphere through the way of transformation. There are three phases of transformation as Psychic, Spiritual, and Supramental transformation. The psychic being is regarded as the permanent and imperishable aspect of our being. In psychic transformation, the psychic being is awakened. Through this process matter, psyche and mind get purified. Then we move to spiritual transformation in which spiritualized mind transcends the dualities. In this transformation, the vision must transform to realization and the descent of higher consciousness takes place. Spiritual transformation is regarded as the process of descent of the Supermind in mind.

The transformation of the mind is regarded as the highest evolute which is also known as Supramental transformation. It is further known as Integral Yoga. In this Yoga, we are liberated from Ignorance and know the truth beyond the Mind. The truth deals with the highest and dynamic spiritual self-manifestation status. His integral yoga harmonizes the paths of Karma, Jnana, and Bhakti.

His yoga speaks about a total transformation of this earthly life into the divine life. It is a way of complete self-realization. This yoga can only be performed by those who are ready to abolish the ego. Those who are able to realize higher transformation are able to integrate harmoniously with God. This final stage of transformation can be seen as the active and progressive resemblance of man to God.

### **Swami Vivekananda's Philosophy of Religion**

Vivekananda said that religion is regarded as a relationship that exists between the soul and God. Religion is not subscribed to a particular faith because it has spirituality in its nature. Realization is very important in religion. Religion comes from within and spiritual realization in every individual is necessary. Nobody can separate religion from an individual's life. Religion is considered as the manifestation of the divinity which already exists within an individual. Religion has no value if there is no inner growth within an individual. He said that through practising yoga, an individual can achieve Divinity. He introduced the method of Yoga through which we can realise Reality. There are four Yogas: Karma, Bhakti, Raja and Jnana. All these forms of Yoga help a yogi. Let us discuss four types of Yoga.

### **Bhakti Yoga**

According to Vivekananda, bhakti yoga is considered as the science of higher love. It teaches us that we have to love without any motives. Bhakti is taken as the absolute and continuous remembrance of the Lord through which we can be directed towards Brahman. Para- Bhakti is regarded as a supreme devotion through which love towards God grows. Bhakti Yogi through his love and devotion works towards complete oneness with the Supreme. Love knows no fear, no reward, no rival, and no bargaining.

### **Karma Yoga**

Karma yoga is regarded as the path of union through action. Karma belongs to both body and mind. It never belongs to the Self. Karma can cast a veil before the Self. Our thought, words, and deeds are regarded as the threads of the veil which we throw round ourselves for good or evil. Karma always leaves its marks on us. Good karmas strengthen moral powers and destroy bad karma. It purifies an individual's mind also.

Individual karmas determine what one deserves. We are responsible for what we are. Individual's present actions determine their future and whatever we are now is just because of one's karma. We should know how to act. Work should be done for work's sake only. Individuals must work with good motives. It is very difficult to follow this in today's society but still one can try. The idea of duty varies from person to person. Every duty has its own place and we must perform our duties without any selfish motive. Work should be done without any boundations and through the medium of love. Selfless service should be given to mankind. All work is composed of good and evil. We should use our knowledge on how to work to fulfill our duties and this knowledge must be spiritual. Spiritual knowledge has the capacity to destroy our ignorance and miseries.

### **Raja Yoga**

It is concerned with the faculty of the mind. Its main aim is to control all thought waves. According to Vivekananda, Raja-Yoga deals with the process of self-realization. It covers various disciplines such as the practice of self-control, concentration, and meditation. These disciplines are also required for the realization of the truths of religion. The process of the mind has unlimited power and to have control over it, is very important. In the method of Raja yoga, no faith or belief is required. It has been said that you should not believe anything until you are able to find it out by yourself. The study of Raja yoga requires constant practice. We should know how to manipulate one's mind so that one can control and make the mind work as we like. Self-realization through the control of the mind is the goal of Raja Yoga.

### **Jnāna Yoga**

According to Vivekananda, Jnāna is regarded as the realization of an individual's own divinity through knowledge. It includes intellectual reasoning. It is regarded as the highest medium of realization. Those who practise are known as Jnāna yogi. Jnāna yogi makes use of philosophic reasoning, knowledge and one's own will in which he believes in. He throws away all old ideas, beliefs, superstitions and desires. Vivekananda further said that God is within your own self which has to be realised. If an individual is able to find his/ her real self then he/she can see the God within oneself. It has been seen that various religions are giving their views against other religions in the form of criticism. For maintaining peace and harmony in society, Vivekananda talked about Universal Religion.

He said that all religions have already proved their strength, their worth, and their necessity for society. Every religion has equal status and is supplementary to each other. He

further said that all religion belongs to the same universal truth. All religion's objective is to spread brotherhood among the world. In Hinduism, spirituality is regarded as an important essence, in Islam notion of brotherhood is important. Christianity also works for brotherhood and peace. When each and every individual realizes the spirituality aspect and Transcendental unity of all religions then only we are able to implement universal religion. He said that the oneness of all religions is very necessary. All religions constitute together one whole reality i.e. realization of God. According to him, only one Eternal Religion exists and other religions are regarded as variations. According to him, all are one.

Vivekananda said that man can become Divine only by realizing The Ultimate Divine. If an individual wants to attain this position then cleansing of mind is very much needed and cleansing of mind will be regarded as spiritual realization. According to him, every religion is unique in itself and through this feature one religion is differentiated from other religions. Every religion prescribes a different method of worshipping idols. Universal religion is considered as beyond the political, national, and geographical limits. It does not involve issues of caste, colour, community, creed, and nationality.

### **Similarities and Differences between Aurobindo and Vivekananda's Concept of Religion**

Both believed in the notion of spirituality and realization of the Divine. According to both, realization of spirituality in an individual is very important. Religion's main aim is to maintain peace and harmony for the welfare of an individual and society. There are many differences between them such as Aurobindo believed in Integral Unity is important whereas, for Vivekananda, universal religion is important. Both have different methods of realizing spirituality. Aurobindo talked about many stages of transformation whereas, for Vivekananda, Yoga is very important. Both have different notions of Yoga. Aurobindo believed in Integral Yoga whereas Vivekananda talked about four types of Yoga. Aurobindo talked about two senses of Swaraj such as political and spiritual whereas Vivekananda didn't talk about this.

### **Relevance of Aurobindo and Vivekananda's Concept of Religion in Today's Scenario**

Aurobindo and Vivekananda's concept of religion is relevant in today's scenario because these days we are continuously witnessing various issues such as violence, communal riots, and terrorism. These days we are facing Corona Virus. We have also witnessed that how one section of religion such as Islam was targeted by media. According to the media, Tablighi Jamaat which belongs to Islam was spreading intentionally Corona Virus. The media

circulated fake news against Tablighi Jamaat and arouse the feeling of hatred in the mind of the citizens of India. If we want to remove all these issues from our society then we have to believe in the notion of spirituality, peace, and harmony which is found in the concept of the religion of Aurobindo and Vivekananda.

### Conclusion

This paper discusses Aurobindo and Swami Vivekananda's Concept of Religion. Aurobindo discussed two different senses of Swaraj such as political and spiritual. We have seen in this paper that both philosophers talk about religion in terms of spirituality, peace, and harmony. We have discussed various similarities and differences between them. Why Aurobindo and Vivekananda's concept of religion is relevant in today's scenario is also discussed? Religion's main goal is to create harmony and peace in society. Individuals are not aware of the main essence of Religion. The realization of Divinity is possible through transformation and practising Yoga.

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