

Universal Religion of Swami Vivekananda: A Vision of Unity and Brotherhood

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Abstract:

One of the greatest thinkers of modern Indian philosophy was Swami Vivekananda. His philosophical perspective was rooted in the social, religious and economic context of Indian society. Ancient Hindu philosophy, especially the Vedanta theory, significantly influenced him. This theory argues that reality is unified and that everything is fundamentally connected. Religion is a key aspect of Vivekananda's philosophy. He views it as essential for human life. However, he does not refer to any of the so-called traditional religions in our world. Instead, he introduces the idea of a universal religion that contains no contradictions found in existing religions. Vivekananda believes that universal religion already exists, but our external conflicts prevent us from recognizing it. Through his concept of universal religion, Vivekananda promotes unity and brotherhood among people. His emphasis on universal religion highlights the realization of oneness and recognizes different ways individuals approach unique religious beliefs. This concept can only succeed if we learn to respect all religious beliefs and treat them as equally valid and true, just like our own.

Keywords: *universal religion, so-called religion, unity and brotherhood, etc.*

Introduction:

Swami Vivekananda believes that religion is essential for life. He states, "of all forces that have worked and are still working to mold the destiny of the human race, none certainly is more potent than that, the manifestation of which we call Religion" (Lal, 2017, p.37). Normally, we consider things that meet our daily needs as necessary. For example, food, clothing and shelter are vital because they satisfy our physical needs. Yet, physical needs alone do not fulfill the human mind. People crave something higher and better. This craving is a religious one, providing mental satisfaction that is crucial for a good life.

Vivekananda recognizes that no description of religion can be complete. While different definitions exist, they often overlook one or more key aspects of religion. Therefore, the best way to understand religion is not to define it but to emphasize the essential aspects that make religious acts meaningful. He identifies two aspects of religion: the external and the internal. According to him, the external aspects have some value but are not essential. A religion becomes truly religious when it connects with the internal aspects. Thus, the essence of

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Published: 28 July 2026

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.70558/IJSSR.2026.v3.i4.301228>

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religion is found in its inner dimensions.

Vivekananda asserts that true religion grows from within and is part of our very nature. He believes that religions serve different purposes in God's plan, working for the good of humanity. Instead of being contradictory, religions are complementary. Vivekananda's universal religion is not a definitive idea of religion but rather an acceptance of the good found in different religions and an acknowledgment of the harmony that exists among them. He claims that the universal religion philosophers have envisioned is already present. The main objectives of this research paper are to highlight the religious aspects of Vivekananda's philosophy and explore its role in promoting unity and brotherhood among people. Many misinterpret his idea of universal religion. Vivekananda did not advocate for a single new religion to replace existing ones. He also did not imply that all religions are identical. Instead, he argued that individuals should embrace the essence of other faiths while remaining true to their distinct beliefs and evolving in accordance with their inner values.

Methodology:

The primary goal of this study is to examine Swami Vivekananda's concept of universal religion and its role in fostering unity and brotherhood among people. The researcher used descriptive and analytical methods for this study, characterizing it as qualitative research.

The study titled "Universal Religion of Swami Vivekananda: A Vision of Unity and Brotherhood" is based largely on a literature review. Both primary and secondary sources have been utilized to gather data relevant to this research. The necessary information has been collected from reputable articles in various research journals, books, and other trustworthy sources.

Discussion and Findings:

Vivekananda argues that religious sense and beliefs are essential components of human thought. Religious thought transcends all human reasoning and intellectual boundaries, a search that has existed in humanity's mind since the dawn of time. He states, "I shall try to bring before you the Hindu theory that religions do not come from without, but from within. It is my belief that religious thought is in man's very constitution, so much so that it is impossible for him to give up religion until he can give up his mind and body, until he can give up thought and life" (Vivekananda, 2022, Vol.3, p.3)

Vivekananda identifies several key characteristics of religion. One significant feature is its link to a supernatural reality, which sets religion apart from other intellectual pursuits and forms the basis of religious life. The object of devotion might vary, whether it be a personal God, the Absolute, or a supernatural moral law. Vivekananda explains that religion aims to go beyond the limits of human senses and rational thought. True religious experiences emerge when individuals move past sensory perception and logical reasoning, affirming truths that ordinary empirical methods cannot grasp. For this reason, Vivekananda describes religion as both trans-empirical and trans-rational.

Another crucial aspect of religion is its value not just for personal development but also for society. A distinction is often drawn between ethics and religion, where morality serves

social needs while religion goes beyond social concerns. However, Vivekananda believes that religion is the foundation of morality. Without this foundation, ethics can become uncertain and chaotic. When we assert that doing good is important, people often ask why we should act morally. This question can only be addressed through universal concepts. Denying universal ideals can lead to conflicting moral principles among different groups. Vivekananda argues that religion provides this universal ideal, granting ethics its meaning, justification, and stability.

He asserts that every religion has three main components. The first is philosophy, which lays out the overall principles and goals of that religion, along with how to achieve them. The second component is mythology, which gives philosophy a concrete form by representing its abstract ideas through the stories of humans and divine beings. The third component is ritual, which is even more tangible, involving various ceremonies, physical postures, flowers, incense, and other sensory elements (Vidyatmananda, 2024).

Vivekananda believed that religion plays a crucial role in human life. He regarded it as the highest and healthiest activity of the human mind because it motivates people to go beyond sensory limitations and strive for the infinite. This spiritual quest provides inner satisfaction, helps individuals rise above life's ordinary troubles, and allows them to find peace and happiness. Therefore, religion stands as the strongest force that inspires and guides the human mind.

It is a fact that there are various religions with different codes and beliefs. There are also many contradictions on various issues among these religions. This happens because followers of different faiths claim their beliefs are the only true ones and dismiss others as ordinary. According to Vivekananda, these contradictions are only surface-level and do not affect the true essence of religion. He states, "It is the clashes of thought, the differentiation of thought, that awakes thought...whirls and eddies occur only in a rushing, living stream. There are no whirlpools in stagnant, dead water" (Vivekananda, 1930, p. 379). Vivekananda describes his vision of a universal religion, saying, "a universal religion, if really universal, must satisfy at least two conditions; first, it must open its gates to every individual, it must admit that nobody is born with this or that religion; whether he takes to one religion or the other must ultimately be left to his inner likes and choice. In this sense, by individualizing religion we really universalize it. Secondly, a really universal religion must be able to give satisfaction and comfort to every religious sect" (Lal, 2017, p. 43).

Vivekananda believes that universal religion already exists, but some people fail to see it due to their narrow views on religion. This universal religion reflects human unity. Although we have physical and mental differences, we are all human beings. Some of us are men, some are women; some are dark-skinned, while others are fair-skinned; some are tall and others short. We also have varied mental abilities. Human strength in knowledge, power and ability is not equal. However, despite these physical and mental differences, we all belong to one race. Unity in variety is the essence of this universe. Humans differ from animals and plants. Yet, as living beings, all creatures share the same fundamental life. At the most profound level of existence, we are unified with the universe. This all-encompassing cosmic existence is God, the ultimate bond that connects us all.

Conclusion:

Vivekananda's universal religion does not involve creating a new religion that surpasses existing ones. Instead, it emphasizes mutual harmony among various religious communities and respect for each other's beliefs. He recognizes that different religions are paths to the same goal. Vivekananda's idea of universal religion encourages us to see our oneness. There are no true distinctions among religions since they are simply different ways of seeking and understanding the absolute. The differences among religions are largely superficial. The teachings of Vivekananda's universal religion help us realize that we are all children of the same Father, and this understanding fosters unity and brotherhood among us.

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