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**Title of Paper: Swami Vivekananda's Spiritual Universalism:
Uniting all Cultures in the Modern Global Village**

Abstract

In his famous speech at the World Parliament of Religions in Chicago on September 11, 1895, Swami Vivekananda quoted from the *Bhagavadgita*: “*As the different streams having their sources in different paths which men take through different tendencies, various though they appear, crooked or straight, all lead to Thee.*” Vivekananda’s call for universal spiritualism here is the call of the hour amidst tensions between nation states, terrorism, ethnic strife, abject poverty and exploitation. For Vivekananda every human being is the same in as much as she/he has a soul and is thereby potentially spiritually free.

Vivekananda’s spiritual humanism lies in the bonding relation of each human with something transcendental, which could be the Brahman of Advaita Vedanta or it could be Allah, Christ, or some other divinity, or nature and ancestors as it is for many tribal religions. The transcendental realm may vary according to each faith, and we must understand each faith to accept their metaphysics. The essential feature of Vivekananda’s worldview is that what is universal and common to all humans is a spiritual pursuit. Vivekananda extensively discusses “universal soul” because he believes in an Advaitic monistic fashion that we are all one as far as transcendental reality is concerned.

We can now properly understand and assess Swami Vivekananda’s description of universalism: “if there is ever to be a universal religion, it must be one which will have no location in place or time; which will be infinite like the God it will preach, and whose sun will shine upon the followers of Krishna and of Christ on saints and sinners alike; which will not be Brahminic or Buddhistic, Christian or Mohammedan, *but the sum total of all these*, and still have infinite space for development.”

Keywords: Universal Spiritualism, Spiritual Humanism, Universal Religion, Terrorism, Exploitation, Advaita Vedanta, Atman (soul), Brahman, Culture.

1. Introduction

In his famous speech at the World Parliament of Religions in Chicago on September 11, 1895, Swami Vivekananda quoted from the *Bhagavadgita*: “*As the different streams having their sources in different paths which men take through different tendencies, various though they appear, crooked or straight, all lead to Thee* (CW, p. 31) ¹.” Vivekananda’s call for universal spiritualism here is the call of the hour amidst tensions between nation states,

¹ All citations from Vivekananda’s Collected Works are by page numbers of the online edition, without citation of volume number and page number. Also, in the citations I use the abbreviation CW for ‘Vivekananda 1907’ which is listed in the references. All of this is for ease of citing as this online edition is easily available at <http://estudentavedanta.net/Complete%20Works%20of%20Swami%20Vivekananda.pdf>

terrorism, ethnic strife, abject poverty and exploitation. For Vivekananda every human being is the same in as much as she/he has a soul and is thereby potentially spiritually free.

Swami Vivekananda's (January 12, 1863 – July 4, 1902) world view and impact may best be described as 'spiritual humanism'. The term 'secular humanism' does not properly characterize Vivekananda. 'Secular' literally means 'not connected with religious or spiritual matters.'² The very essence of Vivekananda lies in religion and spirituality. In its more common meaning in use 'secularism' is thought of as the acceptance and tolerance of all religions. In this sense Vivekananda was a secularist. However, this does not capture the essence of his humanism. He sought to reach a universalism through religion. He saw divinity in each human and thereby was an egalitarian reformer and champion of economic, political and social equality. For Vivekananda, acceptance of all religions is not sufficient:

The unity of religions is based on direct perception of ultimate reality. The paths are different but the goal remains the same. Even if the whole world becomes converted to one religion or another, it will not enhance the cause of unity. Unity in diversity is the plan of the universe. Unity of religions calls for our paying attention to the basic teachings of all faiths, which provide us with the common ground where we are all rooted. Our scientific age is forcing us to find this common unity. Either we remain in our individual religious ghettos or we accept the fact of the innate spiritual unity of all faiths. (Adhiswarananda 2006)

Vivekananda does not deny that one could reach this through one's own religion. However, his approach is a pluralistic one. The last phrase 'innate spiritual unity of all faiths' is instructive because it is not restricted simply to the large organized religions of Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Judaism, Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism, Zoroastrianism, and so on; but 'all faiths' including tribal religions. Vivekananda's expression 'individual religious ghettos' is indicative that he does not believe that merely being devout in one's religion is sufficient for realizing unity, rather we must embrace a full blown pluralism of all religions.

The last sentence, 'Either we remain in our little religious ghettos or we accept the fact of the innate spiritual unity of all faiths,' means that Vivekananda's spiritualism cannot be properly labelled as 'Hindu spiritualism' as that would ghettoize it. Nor, can it be labelled as 'religious humanism' with the somewhat negative connotation to 'religion' given by him here. Hence, 'spiritual humanism' is the proper characterization of Vivekananda, especially with the positive connotation give to it here.

2. Swami Vivekananda as a Humanist

In its positive connotations 'humanism' has the meaning of doing what is good for all of humanity and being devoted to the welfare of humans. In its negative connotation, humanism

² <http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/secular>

is human-centred and thereby anthropomorphic and often excludes the welfare of non-human animals and the ecosystem. From a religious point of view ‘humanism’ is often looked at negatively in the sense that it places humans above God and often humans without God.

In one sense Vivekananda’s humanism is quite simple: It is the unity of all humans in a universal religion. In another sense it is very complex as this unity is found not simply by the acceptance of all religions but by the understanding of all religions. The simple sense seems too naïve. The complex sense seems practically impossible as one does not have time to thoroughly study all religions. In this paper I will unravel how these two senses complement each other.

2.1 Definition of ‘humanism’

There are many kinds of humanism and even more distinct definitions of ‘humanism’. I begin with a comprehensive definition of ‘humanism’ by the American Humanist Association:

Humanism is a (1) rational philosophy informed by science, inspired by art, and motivated by compassion. (2) Affirming the dignity of each human being, it supports the maximization of individual liberty and opportunity consonant with (3) social and planetary responsibility. (4) It advocates the extension of participatory democracy and the expansion of the open society, standing for (5) human rights and social justice. (6) Free of supernaturalism, it (7) recognizes human beings as a part of nature and holds the (8) values—be they religious, ethical, social, or political—have their source in human experience and culture. (9) Humanism thus derives the goals of life from human need and interest rather than from theological or ideological abstractions, and asserts that (10) humanity must take responsibility for its own destiny.³ (my numbering)

2.2 Definition of ‘spiritual humanism’ of Swami Vivekananda

Though Swami Vivekananda’s humanism satisfies all 10 conditions here; whereas the definition here is of ‘humanism’ independent of religion, Vivekananda’s definition is always in conjunction with religion and spirituality. I will now demonstrate how Swami Vivekananda’s humanism satisfies this definition comprehensively, not for humanism *simpliciter*, but for humanism in conjunction with religion or spirituality or ‘spiritual humanism’.

I have concentrated heavily on ‘science’ in (1) and thereby on Vivekananda’s reconciliation of science and religion, liberty or freedom in (2) and social justice in (5) as these seem to be consensus features of any type of humanism which enhances global human development today.

2.2.1 Humanism is a rational philosophy, informed by science, inspired by art, and motivated by compassion:

³ http://americanhumanist.org/humanism/definitions_of_humanism

Vivekananda's philosophy is thoroughly rational always demanding a critical inquiry and honest doubt as the core of spiritual freedom (Adhiswarananda 2006). Panneerselvan and Raja (2015, p. 47) characterize the role of 'rational' in Swami Vivekananda: 'The Atman, the divine one and immortal Self in all, is the only rational sanction, says Swami Vivekananda, for all ethical and moral life and action, for all humanistic impulses and behaviour.' Nehru (1985, p. 188) highlights the importance of reason for Vivekananda:

"Why religions should claim that they are not bound to abide by the standpoint of reason no one knows [...] it is better that mankind should become atheist by following reason than blindly believe in two hundred million gods on the authority of anybody [...]" [...] "I will abide by my reason," continues Vivekananda, "because with all its weakness there is some chance of getting at truth through it [...] We should therefore follow reason, and also sympathise with those that do not come to any sort of belief, following reason." "[...] Believe nothing until you find it out for yourself." Vivekananda's unceasing stress on reason and his refusal to take anything on trust derived from his passionate belief in the freedom of the mind. (the double quotations are quotes from Vivekananda)

Reason played a crucial role in his early development as a thinker. At the same time he was evolving in his spiritual quest such that: 'His faith in the supremacy of reason and his yearning of spiritual realization were at war until he found his guru' (Shodhganga 2015, p. 26). This guru was Ramakrishna in whom he found the synthesis of reason and spirituality rather than their incompatibility.

Vivekananda attempted to reconcile science and spirituality. Jay Lakhani recalls Swami Vivekananda's famous Chicago World's Parliament of Religions speech in which he claimed that experientially all prophets encountered the same spirit. How is this to be reconciled with science?:

One of the greatest divides we face in this century is that between science and spirituality. On one side sits not one, but a multitude of religious world views; on the other side sits a more unified, science-oriented, rationally-founded worldview. A reconciliation is crucial, else the marvellous discoveries at the heart of all religions are in danger of being snuffed out by the far more popular human enterprise—science. (Lakhani 2013)

Vivekananda saw a reconciliation of science and religion as they both had the same ultimate quest for unity: 'In every exact science there is a basis which is common to all humanity, so that we can at once see the truth or the fallacy of the conclusions drawn therefrom. Now, the question is: Has religion any such basis or not?' (CW, p. 371). There is no real conflict between science and religion. In case there is an apparent conflict, it is religion that must yield: 'we must see that it does not contradict other truths; if it contradicts other scientific truths reject it at once' (CW, p. 404). Scientific religion never says "believe" but only says "see" (CW, p. 1842).

Swami Vivekananda's belief in and respect of science extends to his demand of continuously reforming Hinduism, which has always been scientific at core and needs to be

even more scientific now: ‘the scientific age is forcing us to find this common unity’ (Adhiswarananda 2006). Since finding the unity of all religions is at the core of Vivekananda’s world view, his call for making this scientific is a pronouncement of the need to be scientific. As Tenuka Chatterjee (2014, p. 189) puts it Swami Vivekananda ‘emphasized the urgent need for India to assimilate the spirit of modern science [...]’. Vivekananda took on the challenge ‘to become truly scientific and truly spiritual’ (Saikia 2013, p. 89). This again requires access of all to advanced education.

For Vivekananda science provides us with the objective truth whereas Advaita Vedanta gives us the subjective truth of existence, the quest for unity is common to science and religion, and thereby modern science has strengthened religion rather than weakened it (Dey 2013, p. 101). Vivekananda also gives more importance to scientific enquiry rather than gurus in the process of self-discovery (Ibid., p. 105). The essence of Vivekananda’s reconciliation of science and religion is captured by Joshi 2013 (p. 65): ‘He met the challenge of modern science by showing that religion is as scientific as science itself; religion is the “science of consciousness”. This universal conception frees religion from the hold of superstitions, dogmatism, priest craft and intolerance, [...]’.

Since Vivekananda’s humanism is a spiritual humanism centred on the unity of all humans by seeing the divinity in them, let us look at what Vivekananda says about the role of science and rationality in this quest. Even though the search for divinity in ourselves and others is a personal experiential quest and thereby an individual expression, Vivekananda reminds us: ‘But if by any science, any investigation, we are helped to get hold of these finer forces which are the cause of the expression, the expression itself will be under control’ (CW, p. 38).

The most important common feature of science and religion, especially Vedantic Hinduism, for Vivekananda is the quest for unity: ‘the Vedanta is not satisfied to end in dualism, but continues its search for the final unity which is alike the goal of science and religion’ (CW, p. 80). He emphatically pronounced this in his famous Chicago speech on 19th September, 1893: ‘Science is nothing but the finding of unity. As soon as science would reach perfect unity, it would stop from further progress, because it would reach the goal’ (WPR 1893, p. 329)⁴. He also stated ‘if modern science is proving anything again and again, it is this, that we are one—mentally, spiritually, and physically’ (CW, p. 472).

⁴ Though this citation is again from *Collected Works*, I cite it differently to distinguish it as one of the speeches of September, 1893. I use this form of citing it throughout the paper, the page number is however from the online *Collected Works*.

Vivekananda had an ‘unbounded compassion for all’ and urged that the rich have ‘compassion, sympathy and responsibility for the masses’ (Chatterjee 2014, p. 187, 190). For Vivekananda, we need to negate all psychological stresses created by thought and reach the state of love which has the dimensions of compassion and intelligence (Dey 2013, p. 96). He believed that compassion and sacrifice are the two ‘visible manifestation of the inherent divinity of man’ (Mishra 2013, p. 47).

2.2.2 Affirming the dignity of each human being, it supports the maximization of individual liberty and opportunity:

Freedom of the individual, like it is for Sartre, is central to Vivekananda’s philosophy. For Vivekananda ‘the real nature of man is freedom. Freedom is not merely a quality of the soul but it is the very essence of the soul’ (Pal 2012, p. 173). Also, like Sartre with freedom comes the existentialist notion of responsibility: ‘And all the responsibility of good and evil is on you’ (CW, p. 787).

Freedom is at the core of Vivekananda’s world view: ‘Freedom is the watchword. Be free! A free body, a free mind, and a free soul! That is what I have felt all my life; I would rather be doing evil freely than good with bondage’ (CW, p. 67). The freedom here is akin to Simone de Beauvoir’s ‘freedom to’ as well as ‘freedom from’: ‘Be free, and know once for all that there is no chain for you’ (CW, p. 215). Vivekananda also saw freedom as the goal of all development (CW, p. 257). It is hence not surprising that in the Opportunity dimension of the Human Development Index, freedom is highlighted as a component: ‘personal rights, personal freedom and choice.’

The crucial freedom for Vivekananda was the freedom of the soul: ‘freedom from the bonds of imperfection, freedom from death and misery’ (CW, p. 328); ‘Freedom of the soul is the goal of all Yogas’ (CW, p. 346); ‘Get freedom, even at the cost of life’ (CW, p. 1827). In this way authentic global development can take place from the natural capabilities of humans not from a sense of duty.

Freedom is also the foundation of love (CW, p. 346). ‘The goal of all nature is freedom, and freedom is to be attained only by perfect unselfishness’ (CW, p. 365). Vivekananda ties freedom to Advaita, ‘God, even in the crudest form, is the idea of freedom; and the idea of freedom and of unchangeability is one and the same’ (CW, p. 490). Once this unchangeability is realized there are no chains, even of the body that bind us, it is absolute freedom perhaps a step beyond Sartre’s absolute freedom.

Vivekananda hailed the notion of political freedom or liberty as in the French revolution: ‘Liberty, Equality and Fraternity’ (CW, p. 177) and in the American revolution

‘motherland of liberty’ (CW, p. 331). He saw that the notion of liberty has to do with social and economic egalitarianism: ‘the whole French nation became mad in the name of liberty and equality’ (CW, p. 1453). Political freedom for Vivekananda is not an end in itself. It is nonetheless a necessary condition for his spiritual humanism.

Vivekananda’s concept of freedom is best captured in the following passage:

‘One should raise the self by the self.’ Let each work out one’s own salvation. Freedom in all matters, i.e. advance towards Mukti is the worthiest gain of man. To advance one’s self towards freedom—physical, mental and spiritual—and help others to do so, is the supreme prize of man. Those social rules which stand in the way of the unfoldment of this freedom are injurious, and steps should be taken to destroy them speedily. Those institutions should be encouraged by which men advance in the path of freedom. (CW, p. 1265)

Though spiritual freedom is the goal for Vivekananda, social, political and economic freedom and free choices in these matters as well as individuals’ personal rights are necessary conditions that must be achieved so that spiritual freedom can be realized. Hence, Vivekananda is right in line with the demands of the Human Development Index.

2.2.3 Social and planetary responsibility:

This is the key component of Vivekananda that links him to a philosophy and sociology of human development for our age. Vivekananda (1863–1902) was a reformer along the lines of others of the 19th century, such as, Raja Ram Mohan Roy (1772–1833)⁵, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar (1820–1991), Gopal Hari Deshmukh (1823–1892), Jotiba Govind Phule (1827–1890), Keshab Chandra Sen (1838–1884).⁶

Vivekananda was well aware that humanism in its common form is geared towards the social responsibility of doing good for others. This is compatible with spiritual humanism as the end result is the same: ‘Never say man is weak [...] Love is the ideal and requires no object. Love is God. So even through devotion we reach the subjective God. [...] Let the atheist and the agnostic work for the social good. So God comes’ (CW, p. 2086).

Planetary responsibility today means an eco-centred thinking. Vivekananda was aware of this when he extended the notion of compassion to all beings. Compassion must extend not only to all humans but to all creatures as Vivekananda cites the *Bhagavadgita* for this: ‘Thou hast compassion for all creatures’ (CW, p. 969). Vivekananda’s distinction between love and compassion is important today as love extends to humans or God, but not to other creatures or the ecosystem, but compassion is extended to all creatures and the planet, even the cosmos: ‘when you serve a Jiva with the idea that he is a Jiva, it is Dayâ (compassion) and not Prema (love)’ (CW, p. 1251). Since he seems room for both love and

⁵ <http://www.indiacelebrating.com/general-awareness/social-reformers-of-india/>

⁶ <https://mrityunjaysingh.wordpress.com/2010/11/14/social-reforms-of-india-in-18th-and-19th-century/>

compassion, again he is in line with the feature of serving the ecosystem in the Human Development Index.

2.2.4 Participatory democracy and the expansion of the open society:

Vivekananda was a globalist, ahead of his times and this was one of the reasons his famous speech in Chicago in 1893 was so admired. He was a true believer in ‘think globally, and act locally.’ Democracy must begin with being participatory as it has been in Indian history for ages with strong consensus democracies. Democracy must end up with an open society, not only for one’s village, community, city or nation but for the entire world.

Vivekananda does not lay great emphasis on the history of Indian democracy as a consensus democracy going as far back as four millennia. Rather, he works with the modern Western notion of ‘democracy’. He foresees, futuristically, how the emerging Indian nation, especially when it is free of colonial rule will be a model of participatory democracy:

It will certainly end in the working out of India’s homogeneity, in her acquiring what we may call democratic ideas. Intelligence must not remain the monopoly of the cultured few; it will be disseminated from higher to lower classes. Education is coming, and compulsory education will follow. The immense power of our people for work must be utilised. India’s potentialities are great and will be called forth. (CW, p. 1311)

Free and compulsory education up to at least high school graduation for all and equal opportunities for people to work in occupations of their choice, as we know today, are keys to a participatory democracy.

But it is a participatory democracy with a pluralistic base. As India had always been a pluralistic society at the time of Independence in 1947, when the work on the Constitution of India began, the founders of the new nation kept this multi-culturalism in mind. They operated on the principle that though as one nation we need one Constitution to unite us and take us forward, they also recognized the need for each culture within the nation to preserve and sustain its identity without threat of extinction. This type of pluralism is the exact antithesis of the “melting pot” of different cultures into one homogenous culture as is experienced in some nations. It is this pluralism and not the melting pot that is the essence of Vivekananda’s spiritual humanism. Furthermore, if we extend this pluralism to the global village, spiritual humanism can thus be what unites all cultures, not into one culture but into a human bonding while maintaining the autonomy and history of each culture.

2.2.5 Human rights and social justice:

Spiritual egalitarianism entails equal human rights for everyone and it also entails equal economic opportunity that is the call for social justice around the world today. We will not find explicit demands in Vivekananda for social justice as we understand the term ‘social

justice' today. However, the reformists including Vivekananda were all motivated by social justice, that is, seeing the elimination of social ills around them, such as oppression of widows.

We will also not find in Vivekananda explicit advocacy of 'human rights' as we understand the word today in terms of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights by the United Nations.⁷

The preamble of this declaration states at the beginning: 'Whereas recognition of inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world [...]'⁸ Freedom is foundational for Vivekananda, especially spiritual freedom. Vivekananda promotes a total egalitarianism in terms of everyone having an equal soul, in fact part of the same universal soul but equally a soul for each. This implies the dignity of each individual regardless of their gender, caste, creed, race, occupation, and so on. Vivekananda responds to perpetuation of caste hierarchies in the name of Hinduism: 'No religion on earth preaches the dignity of humanity in such a lofty strain as Hinduism' (CW, p. 1158). Article 1 of the Declaration states: 'All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.'⁹ This is in line with the core of Vivekananda's philosophy as it has to do with individual's freedom, spiritual freedom as well as social and political freedom, and an individual's reasoning and critical abilities to choose one's own path in life. Love is the founding stone of Vivekananda's philosophy and when we understand what love is and practice it brotherhood is a consequence: 'When we really begin to love the world, then we understand what is meant by brotherhood or mankind, and not before' (CW, p. 633).

With the focus on human rights arising from the core of Vivekananda's spiritual humanism and the requirement of the freedom of each individual we see then in Vivekananda the foundation of the unity of all cultures as well as all individuals in the global village. It is hence a comprehensive humanism that is the need of the hour.

2.2.6 *Human beings are part of nature:*

Vivekananda was never anthropocentric. His divine centrism entails that humans are part of nature, not superior to it, guardians of it or protectors of it, but one with it. He accepted nature as central within the divine plan of the cosmos. We are not to rule over nature but we are

⁷ http://www.ohchr.org/EN/UDHR/Documents/UDHR_Translations/eng.pdf

⁸ http://www.ohchr.org/EN/UDHR/Documents/UDHR_Translations/eng.pdf

⁹ http://www.ohchr.org/EN/UDHR/Documents/UDHR_Translations/eng.pdf

parts of nature, as he says: 'We exist. We see we are finite beings. We live and die. Our horizon is narrow. We are here, limited, confronted by the universe all around. Nature can crush us out of existence in a moment. Our little bodies are just held together, ready to go to pieces at a moment's notice' (CW, p. 662). This is a clear anti-anthropocentric declaration.

With an ecocentric primacy of nature we again have an essential feature that unites all cultures into a harmonious global village. This must be kept in mind when we go towards solving the riddled and persistent series of ethnic and nationalistic conflicts around the world that are costing not only so many human lives but also the destruction of the planet. And God forbid, if nuclear weapons are ever used, they will call the ultimate destruction of all species and of mother earth herself. If we follow the path of Swami Vivekananda's spiritual humanism this apocalyptic end will never be a possibility.

2.2.7 Values are grounded in culture and experience:

Vivekananda saw the influence of culture not as a matter of conditioning but as a matter of enhancing the creative, ethical and spiritual of individuals. He laid the greatest emphasis on experience as the realization of divinity itself is a matter of personal experience not of reading, writing or attending seminars. However, if the demand here is an ethical relativism, this Vivekananda would reject. For him cultures, though not experience, may bind humans from being truly ethical: 'Any system that wants to bind men down to the limits of their own societies is not able to find an explanation for the ethical laws of mankind' (CW, p. 535).

This is the key to understanding Vivekananda's spiritual humanism. We must preserve what is good about each of our cultures. But we must also reject and discard what is regressive in each of our cultures, what makes us ethnocentric and unable to accept other cultures. Being proud about our culture should lead to respecting the plurality of all cultures so that we can live in harmony in the global village.

2.2.8 Humanity must take responsibility for its own destiny:

Vivekananda was close to existentialism in placing great importance in the responsibility of individuals, but not just for themselves but for all of humanity, again because of his spiritual egalitarianism, that we are all the same because the same divinity is present in each of us.

Vivekananda takes an existentialist stand on destiny as he says: 'We make our own destiny' (CW, p. 600). And again, 'one's destiny is in one's own hands' (CW, p. 1780). The destiny is not only in the context of the individual but in the context of society: 'only by harmony and brotherhood among religions and by mutual toleration and help can the mission and destiny of humanity be accomplished' (CW, p. 804).

Sartre saw in individual freedom the bonding with every other human as every other human is also free like I am. Wherever there are constraints on human freedom there will be a difficulty of self-realization and self-actualization of each human. Swami Vivekananda's spiritual humanism is similar. In realizing that I have the spiritual freedom to pursue my final goal in whatever manner I want, I bond with all souls who are also pursuing their final goal. Hence, the individual responsibility simultaneously synchronizes with a universal responsibility of all citizens of the global village.

2.3 Synoptic definition of 'spiritual humanism' of Swami Vivekananda

Now we can define 'spiritual humanism' for Swami Vivekananda as a humanism that arises out of the equality of each soul, and thereby the divinity in each human being, requiring each of us to respect the dignity of the other regardless of gender, caste, creed, nationality, and so on; attainment of social justice assuring spiritual, political, social and economic freedom for all is a necessary condition of this humanism; and the goal is the quest for the unity of all religions, practicing the principle of toleration along with a continued effort for a thorough understanding of each religion as that is the path to realize what is common to all religions, the unity amongst the diversity.

It is this well drawn out concept of 'unity in diversity' that leads to the uniting of all cultures in the global village. Each culture has its own history and perhaps its own end point. This must be sustained. However, as the world is getting smaller in terms of communications and economic inter-dependence, this diversity must be complemented with the unity in the goal of global harmony. If there is a conflict between the two, it is perhaps cultural diversity that would have to be sacrifice. However, if we follow Vivekananda's spiritual humanism intricately there need not be any conflict between the two. Rather they are perfect complements to each other. And this is the true meaning of 'unity in diversity.'

3. The Four Fundamental Principles of Vivekananda's Teachings

The four fundamental principles of Swami Vivekananda's teachings will further help us to the essence of his spiritual humanism and how it is a prescription for comprehensive human development.

3.1 *Non Duality of Ultimate Reality*

Ultimate reality is non-dual and we have an innate ability to overcome our separateness from each other as well as overcoming our finitude (Adiswarananda 2006). This will lead to the unity of humankind. Vivekananda appealed to Advaita Vedanta for non-dualism. I could go on forever finding quotations to support this. Let me just insert one here: 'The Vedanta philosophy [...] comprises all the various sects that now exist in India. Thus there have been

various interpretations, and to my mind they have been progressive, beginning with the dualistic or Dvaita and ending up with the non-dualistic or Advaita' (CW, p. 467). Vivekananda hence sees Advaita at the apex of the evolution of Vedantic philosophy with non-dualism as its core. The meaning of 'non-dualistic' is best captured by Vivekananda while referring to the New Testament: 'There is the non-dualistic stage, in which man realizes that the God he has been worshiping is not only the God in heaven, and on earth, but that "I and my Father are one." He realizes in his soul that he is God himself, only a lower expression of Him' (CW, p. 453).

3.2 Divinity of the Soul

Divinity is the most vital part of our lives but it is not achieved by pilgrimages, bathing in holy water or rituals, and the foundation of religion is the faith in our divinity (Adiswarananda 2006).

The divinity of the soul is described by Vivekananda in his speech on September 19, 1893 as: 'The Vedas teach that the soul is divine, only held in the bondage of matter; perfection will be reached when this bond will burst, and the world they use for it is therefore, Mukti—freedom, freedom from the bonds of imperfection, freedom from death and mystery' (WPR 1893, p. 328).

3.3 Unity of Existence

Unity of existence is the law of the universe and selfishness and greed disrupt this unity and lead to self-destruction (Adiswarananda 2006). Hence, we must overcome selfishness and greed and reach the unity of humankind. This makes social justice a necessary condition for Vivekananda's spiritual humanism.

Vivekananda's unity is indeed unity in diversity as he puts it in his famous Chicago speech on September 19, 1893: 'Unity in variety is the plan of nature, and the Hindu has recognized it' (WPR 1893, p. 330). This unity in diversity is essential in realizing the goal of all religions to reach the divine. Hence, Vivekananda concludes 'To the Hindu, then, the whole world of religions is only a travelling, a coming up, of different men and women, through various conditions and circumstances, to the same goal' (WPR 1893, p. 330). The aim of different religions seems to be to reach divinity. We come to realize that there is a unity of all humans in as much as their realization of divinity is concerned. Through the unity we can realize the divinity. However, this unity itself is divinity, so that the unity of all religions becomes the goal of each religion. This is a happy paradox.

3.4 Harmony of Religions

Vivekananda's principle of the harmony of religions is simply a corollary of the first three principles and the unity of religion is attained by learning the essence of the teachings of *all* religions (Adiswarananda 2006).

Vivekananda's synthesis of science, reason and spirituality is the key to the understanding of his quest for the unity of all religions. With a scientific, rational spirit Vivekananda believed 'that true religion is above all dogmas, creeds, rituals, and religiosity' (Shodhganga, p. 40).

Hinduism, for Vivekananda, in principle is the religion of the unity of all religions as he states: 'From the high spiritual flights of the Vedanta philosophy, of which the latest discoveries of science seem like echoes, to the low ideas of idolatry with its multifarious mythology, the agnosticism of the Buddhists, and the atheism of the Jains, each and all have a place in the Hindu's religion' (*CW*, p. 326). The notion of cause in modern science and Vedanta is also the same for Vivekananda: 'Vedanta and modern science both posit a self-evolving cause' (*CW*, p. 1849). Knowledge 'becomes scientific knowledge when I group you together and call you human beings' (*CW*, p. 79). This is the aim of religion according to Vivekananda's spiritual humanism of finding the unity of all religions by realizing and perceiving the divinity in every human.

For Vivekananda, the harmony of all religions lies in his principle of tolerance as he states in one of his famous speeches at the World's Parliament of Religions on September 11, 1893: 'I am proud to belong to a religion which has taught the world both tolerance and universal acceptance' (*WPR* 1893, p. 324). The unity of religions is simple but difficult to achieve as each religion forces people to stay in their wells thinking this is the world (*WPR* 1893, p. 326) as Swami Vivekananda told the audience in Chicago on September 15, 1893.

Though 'culture' is a broader categorization than religion, religion often ends up being the main defining feature of a culture. We can thus extend Vivekananda's unity of all religions into unity of all cultures.

4. Conclusion: Vivekananda's Spiritual Humanism and Human Development

Vivekananda's spiritual humanism lies in the bonding relation of each human with something transcendental, which could be the Brahman of Advaita Vedanta or it could be Allah, Christ, or some other divinity, or nature and ancestors as it is for many tribal religions. The transcendental realm may vary according to each faith, and we must understand each faith to accept their metaphysics. The essential feature of Vivekananda's worldview is that what is universal and common to all humans is a spiritual pursuit. Vivekananda extensively discusses "universal soul" because he believes in an Advaitic monistic fashion that we are all

one as far as transcendental reality is concerned. This is exactly what is required for the unity of all individuals and all cultures in the global village.

We can now properly understand and assess Swami Vivekananda's description of universalism: "if there is ever to be a universal religion, it must be one which will have no location in place or time; which will be infinite like the God it will preach, and whose sun will shine upon the followers of Krishna and of Christ on saints and sinners alike; which will not be Brahminic or Buddhistic, Christian or Mohammedan, *but the sum total of all these*, and still have infinite space for development (CW, p. 331)."

Harmony in the global village requires social justice at the global level. Hence, the focus today has shifted on sustainable global development, let us conclude with Vivekananda's contribution to this as stated in his final Chicago Speech on September 27, 1893:

If the Parliament of Religions has shown anything to the world it is this: It has proved to the world that holiness, purity and charity are not the exclusive possessions of any church in the world, and that every system has produced men and women of the most exalted character. In the face of this evidence, if anybody dreams of the exclusive survival of his own religion and destruction of other religions, I pity him from the bottom of my heart, and point out to him that upon the banner of every religion will soon be written, in spite of resistance: "Help and non Fight," "Assimilation and not Destruction," "Harmony and Peace and not Dissension." (WPR 1893, p. 335).

Sustainable global development is the call of the day and millions are people around the world are spending their lives working to achieve this on a day to day basis through government agencies, NGOs, UN organizations and other humanitarian organizations. All their efforts have to be applauded. However, the fact remains that there are still major conflicts around the world, often based on religion and ethnicity. This is a big hurdle for sustainable global development. All that I have unveiled in this paper about Vivekananda's spiritual humanism, and especially the notions of universal tolerance and the unity of all religions under the slogan of 'unity in diversity' can indeed be a great ally for all those who are devoted to sustainable global development as it would remove great hurdles in their way towards achieving the goal of a harmonious global village.

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