

‘THE IDEA OF TOLERANCE & UNIVERSAL HARMONY WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF RELIGIOUS PLURALISM IN SWAMI VIVEKANANDA’S ‘THE CHICAGO SPEECH’



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ABSTRACT

The objective of this research paper is to acquaint the readers about the powerful and appealing speech delivered by Swami Vivekananda to the people of America. He employed the slogan: ‘Uttisthata Jagrata Prapya Varannibodhata’ and attempted to imbibe the significance, glorious tradition and insights of Hindu philosophy. Being the Indian delegate of unparalleled inter-faith congress, Swami Vivekananda’s welcome address introduced the world to Hinduism. This brief speech propagates the idea of tolerance, love, universal harmony and brotherhood within the context of religious pluralism. His speech brought him international awareness. After this, he embarked on a series of public and private lectures spreading the doctrines of Hindu viewpoints in the UK, the USA and Europe, initiating the western globe to the cogent and humanistic canon of Yoga and Vedanta, he travelled worldwide for almost four years spreading inter-faith consciousness.

Keywords: *Tolerance, Universal Harmony, Love, Brotherhood, Religious Pluralism, Hinduism, Nationalism, Chicago speech etc.*

INTRODUCTION

Swami Vivekananda has close resemblance with acquaintance of Indian beliefs, Vedanta. He is well known for his sincere attempts to bring together Indian inherent ideals of faith and western acquisitive development. He delivered a speech at ‘The World Parliament of

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Religion' at Chicago in 1893 to the people of America known as 'The Chicago Speech'. The occasion is documented as the first ceremonial assemblage of legislature from eastern and western devout ethnicity.

Swami Vivekananda opines:

*'Each and every religion at its core values tolerance and respect for other points of view and religions. Blind faith leads to disharmony and is dangerous. India has a long and celebrated culture of tolerance. It has sheltered persecuted minorities and encouraged them to blend into its social fabric. Indian music, arts, history, languages, architecture and all such aspects of its cultural life, bears testimony to this. It is a legacy we are proud of and it is incumbent on each one of us to preserve and protect that legacy.'*¹

Vivekananda addressed the Assembly on six different occasions in 1893:

1. The response to welcome on September 11
2. 'Why We Disagree' on September 13
3. The paper on Hinduism on September 19
4. 'Religion Not the Crying Need of India' on September 20
5. 'Buddhism, the Fulfillment of Hinduism' on September 26
6. The address at the final session on September 27

The major research is especially on the response to welcome, why we disagree and the final session.

• **Response to Welcome, the first Session of the Parliament: 11th September 1893**

The first session of the Parliament was held on Monday the 11th September 1893 in the airy *Hall of The Art Institute*. Many people from different religions such as Buddhism, Jainism, Christianity etc. came along with the preparation of their speech but Swami Vivekananda, without having any preparation made up his mind to communicate about the doctrines Hindu philosophy. At the outset of his conversation, Vivekananda argues that Hinduism endows with a sunshade large enough to cover all of the so-called aboriginal civilization of India. At the afternoon time, he began his speech by addressing the audience as Sisters and Brothers of America which won wide great compliment by the audience. He then thanked them. (Panorama, p.80)

'Sisters and Brothers of America, it fills my heart with joy unspeakable to rise in response to the warm and cordial welcome which you have given us. I thank

you in the “name of ancient monks in the world, mother of all religions and millions of Hindus of all classes and sects.”²

He further asserts that he was self-righteous to belong to a creed which has educated the world both open-mindedness and worldwide recognition. He also mentioned to be pompous of being of a belief which has protected refugees of all religious conviction and all nation of the earth. He further continued that all religion is like the ‘globule of water’ having diverse sources and finally merges with the sea. Consequently we should discontinue acute viewpoints that may escort to irrational behaviour. He appeals to the audience, (Panorama, p.82)

‘I fervently hope that the bell that tolled may be the death knell of all fanaticism, of all persecutions with the sword or with the pen and of all uncharitable feelings between persons wending their way to the same goal.’³

Why We Disagree: 15th September 1893

Later, Swami Vivekananda tells about the habit of abusing others and much variance. He deliberately illustrates a cause of this discrepancy through an example of a frog who lived in a well for a long time. It was born and brought up there and still it was a little, small frog. The responsibility of the frog was to clean the water every day and to survive with energy to the unknown of the outer world. In this way, it went on and became a little glossy and overweight. One day another frog that lived in the sea came and fell into the well. Now the frog of the well started boasting of himself and comparing the world of the sea with the well. (Panorama, p.83)

‘Is the sea as big as my well? Nothing can be bigger than my well. There can be nothing bigger than this.’⁴

The fact was that this small frog that was living in the well, of narrow minded and don’t know the scope of the sea. His knowledge was very limited and confined with prejudices. He does not tolerate the matter that sea was vast and bigger than the well.

So he calls the frog of the sea as a nonsense and liar. Until and unless the frog from the sea made him comprehend about the vast sea, the frog from the well did not know of the possibilities of a bigger world. Through this example, Swami Vivekananda wants to open our inner eyes. Likewise the Hindus, Jains, Christians, Muslims sit in their little well and think the whole world is his well. Here the word ‘well’ refers to ‘religion’. The same is the notion of each religion or sect.

Vivekananda, with this story expresses thankfulness towards America for the great attempt and initiative for breaking down the barriers of this little world of ours and hope that, in the future, the lord will help them to accomplish their purpose. But the real fact is:

*'Religion connects human beings with analogous fellow feelings. The perception which triumphs around the globe, in the name of faith has to be cleared and such dealings blotch a landmark to expose similarities in the midst of differences.'*⁵

Addressing the Final Session: 27th September 1893

Swami Vivekananda proposes vote of thanks to the entire noble souls whose large hearts and love of truth first dreamed this wonderful dream and then realized it. He also thanks to the enlightened audience for their uniform kindness to him and for their appreciation of every thought that tends to smooth the friction of religions. Vivekananda claims that one should not win by destroying other in the name of religion. Every religion has its own law for growth and we should not try to convert any person into other religion but should preserve his eccentricity. He praises them for having common grounds of religious unison and asserted that: (Panorama, p.84)

*'The Christian is not to become a Hindu or a Buddhist, nor a Hindu or a Buddhist to become a Christian. Every religion must assimilate the spirit of the others and yet preserve his individuality and grow according to his own law of growth.'*⁶

CONCLUSION:

Swami Vivekananda concludes his dialogue by revealing the genuineness of sustaining the civilization. At the same time, he expresses India's history of sacred lenience and inconsistency in the cosmos. He focuses on the malevolence personalities that thwart the encroachment of the society.

Finally he proclaims that Parliament of Religions has publicized and proved to the world that consecration, limpidness and charity are not the restricted belongings of any church in the world and that every system has produced men and women of the most dignified character. (Panorama, p.84)

'In the face of this substantiation, if anybody imaginings of the elite endurance of his own religion and the annihilation of the others, 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



*confrontation: Help and not wrestle, adjustment and not obliteration, synchronization and tranquility and not conflict.*⁷

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