

Religious Harmony and Peace Through Knowledge – A Vision of Swami Vivekanand

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Religious harmony and peace is the backbone of a cultural and civilized society and nation. It is ingrained in the Indian psyche. All the invaders who came to India since ancient times, got so perfectly assimilated in the Indian society, that today no one can say if he is not a descendant of any one of them. Whatever their religion was, it got dissolved in the vast humanity of India. After the uprising of Islam in the Middle East, people belonging to the Zoroastrian religion, and those to the Syrian church, came to India to save themselves from those who believed in Islam. Such incidents prompted Swami Vivekanand to say, that "we have gathered in our bosom, the pure remnants of the Israelites, who came to India and took refuge with us when their holy temple was shattered to pieces by Roman tyranny. Thereafter, on 11th. September, 1893, Swami Vivekanand declared in the Parliament of Religions in Chicago, that he was "proud to belong to a nation which has shattered the persecuted refugees of all religions and nations on earth."

Religious harmony is the key to a peaceful society. It comes about where there is understanding between the followers of various faiths. For a country like India, which has been the birthplace of several major religions of the world, religious harmony is important, as it is the need of the hour to make India and the world, a better place to live

In. Whether it is a gathering of the faithful, bowing in prayer in a courtyard of a mosque, or the gathering of lamps that light up houses at Diwali, the good cheer of Christmas, or the brotherhood of Baisakhi, the religions of India are celebrations of shared emotions that bring people together. Even during the reign of the British, there was no religious tension among the peoples of various religions. India, a multi-racial, multi-lingual and multi-racial country, has always enjoyed the essential unity of culture amidst diversities that kept her people united. After independence, narrow regional and communal feelings attracted the country. The apparently mindless communal tensions and bloody riots that take place occasionally, create a sense of mistrust among the two principal religious communities involved in the clashes. The country pays a heavy price for such disturbances through loss of life and property. The alarming rise of fundamentalism is a great concern to the nation. Inter-communal relationship suffers a breach in this vitiated atmosphere. Our unity, integrity and solidarity is now at stake. It hampers the growth of the nation at every step. It is important to spread the message of communal harmony, so that the evil forces trying to break our nation are crushed at any cost.

Swami Vivekanand renewed peoples' interest in religion, by bringing it to the centre stage, after infusing it with new meaning. He promoted inter-faith harmony. Hence his teachings are of great relevance, particularly in the current context. For Vivekanand, service to God meant service to the disadvantaged. He coined a new word *Daridranarayan* – seeing God in the less privileged – and it was upheld as a religious axiom. He promoted rationality in the human conduct, so that religion related itself to the intellectual side

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