

SWAMI VIVEKANANDA (1863-1902)

The process of Renaissance in Hinduism started with Raja Ram Mohan Roy and it was further developed by the Arya Samaj of Swami Dayanad Saraswathi, the Prarthana Samaj and the Satyashodhak Samaj of Jotiba Phule. Sri Ramakrishna Mission, founded by Swami Vivekananda, played a key role in renaissance and reformation of Hindu society. There was a new interpretation of Vedanta philosophy of Swami Vivekananda and Sri Aurobindo Gosh were two major interpreters of Neo-Vedanta philosophy. They were of the opinion that Neo-Vedanta philosophy would increase cultural strength of Hinduism and pave the way for the growth of nationalism in modern India. They interpreted Indian nationalism in the contest of reformation and rejuvenation of Hinduism.

Swami Vivekananda, whose real name was Narendranath Dutta, was born in an aristocratic Kshatriya family of Calcutta on the 20th January, 1863. He was a seer, an illumined soul, very much different from the ordinary run of mankind. His mind was inimitable, he had that supreme knowledge of which the Gita speaks and which results from the realisation of oneness with the Supreme Being. Besides, he had within himself a fountain of energy to carry his message not only to the different parts of India but to the western countries also. Once Sri Ramakrishna said about his young disciple Narendra, who is known to the world as Swami Vivekananda ' He is not a pond, he is a reservoir. He is not a pitcher or a jug, he is a veritable barrel...He is not an ordinary sixteen petalled lotus, he is a glorious lotus with a thousand petals .' This beautiful summing up of Vivekananda personality suggests about his strength, vigor and endurance. The world knows him as a gigantic that employed his will power and energy to bring about a regeneration of India. He was a pilgrim of the city of God and a warrior for the cause of the suppressed and oppressed all over the world. His personality was notable for its comprehensiveness and deep sensitiveness to the evils prevalent in the socio-economic and moral structure of the country. Due to his heroic mood and sometimes even domineering character, Swami Vivekananda was called, the 'Hindu Napoleon'.

PHILOSOPHICAL FOUNDATIONS OF VIVEKANANDA'S POLITICAL THOUGHT

Vivekananda came under the influence of rationalist thought of his time. He was much impressed by European science, liberalism and democratic pattern of western society as expressed in political and sociological literature. The sources of the philosophy of Vivekananda are threefold. First, the great Vedic and vedantic tradition. Vedantic philosophy of Sankaracharya influenced a lot to the social philosophy of Vivekananda. Vivekananda was an apostle of the Advaita Vedanta and he belongs to the tradition of the commentators on the Advaita system. He studied the ideas and principles of J. S. Mill, the philosophers of French Revolution, Kant and Hegel. He even entered into correspondence with Herbert Spencer and offered criticism of some of his ideas. Secondly, a powerful source of Vivekananda's philosophy was his contact with Ramakrishna Paramahansa (1836 – 1886), one of the greatest saints and mystics of modern India. While Ramakrishna Paramahansa had preached his sermons in a style of prophetic simplicity and clarity, Vivekananda was the philosopher combined with the religious teacher. Hence he preached some of these same truths in more philosophical languages and used modern logical terminology. Thirdly, a rich source of Vivekananda's philosophy was his own experience of life. He traversed the wide world and to the interpretation of his experiences. Ramakrishna's death in August, 1886 brought a change in Vivekananda's life. After the death of his master, he embarked upon extensive travels from the Himalayas to the Cape Comorin (Kanyakumari) with an urge to spread the message of Ramakrishna and see the natural beauty of Motherland and visited all the important centers of Indian culture. Through his travels he not only saw India's cultural wealth, the strength of her traditions, but they also saw her socio- economic backwardness, evils of caste system and her mental inertia into which she had fallen.

SOCIAL AND POLITICAL IDEAS OF VIVEKANANDA

Swami Vivekananda established the Ramakrishna Mission to serve the people. He wanted to find a new path of progress for Hinduism because he was not happy with the reform movements as they were

mere imitations of the western world. He had three alternatives before him. First, to follow the path shown by Raja Ram Mohan Roy and join Brahma Samaj. Secondly, to follow the path of total renunciation and go to Himalayas to attain the goal of liberation. Thirdly, to follow the path of service to the society and create social awakening in the minds of people about modernization of the Indian society. Swami Vivekananda chose the third path and told the Indians to see Narayana (God) in the form of a poor beggar dying of starvation. Thus for Vivekananda the Ramakrishna Mission should stand for selfless service of the people, ceaseless efforts to find truth and thereby for reawakening of the spirit of India. During Vivekananda's life time and after his death, Sri Ramakrishna Mission played a key role in the renaissance of Hinduism. HIS VIEWS ON RELIGION AND HINDUISM Swami Vivekananda made a distinct and notable contribution to world religion in his championship of Hinduism as a universal gospel of ethical humanism and spiritual idealism. Hinduism had been the subject of intense misrepresentation at the hands of Christian missionaries. According to him, Hinduism was the mother of religions and this can be, to some extent, demonstrated historically. The ancient Vedic religion influenced Buddhism and the later was possibly a potent factor in the rise of Christianity. Vivekananda's exposition and defence of Hinduism at the parliament of Religions led the 'New York Herald' to remark that the swami was the greatest figure in the parliament. It further added: 'After hearing him we feel how foolish it is to send missionaries to this learned land'.

Vivekananda was a representative of entire Hinduism from the Vedas to Vaisnavism. He did not emphasize the sanctities of the Veda to the same extent as did the late swami Dayananda. He defined religion as the vital and moral force which gives strength to a person or to a nation. According to Vivekananda, 'Strength is life, weakness is death'. In heroic words, Vivekananda declared: 'But this is not the time with us to weep, even in joy, we have had weeping enough; no more is this the time for us to become soft. This softness has been with us till we have become like masses of cotton. What our country now wants are muscles of iron and nerves of steel, gigantic will, which nothing can resist, which..... will

accomplish their purpose in any fashion, even if it meant going down the bottom of the ocean and meeting death face to face. This is what we want, and that can only be created, established and strengthened by understanding and realizing the ideal of the advaita, that ideal of the oneness of all.' Jawaharlal Nehru in his 'The Discovery of India'. had pointed out that the great refrain of Vivekananda's teaching was fearlessness.

PHILOSOPHY OF NEO-VEDANTA

Swami Vivekananda was fundamentally a man of religion and philosophy. Vedanta philosophy was one of the most important ancient philosophies of India which believed that God above was real and the visible world was unreal and the absorption of individual soul in the one supreme soul was the goal of every human being. This is called liberation which could be achieved with the help of true knowledge. Vivekananda followed the Vedanta philosophy preached by his teacher which was rooted in the traditional Indian wisdom of Bhakti tradition. He did not ask people to perform their duties in the spirit of selflessness. There were three important principles of neoVedanta philosophy of Vivekananda. They were as follows:

1. Vedanta philosophy believed in the oneness between God and man and the solidarity of the universe.
2. It did not stand for a life of renunciation but stood for selfless action in the services of humanity. Hence, service for man should be treated as services of god.
3. It propagated the principle of universal tolerance and believed that different religious faiths were different paths to reach the goal of liberation.

According to Vivekananda, New- Vedanta philosophy stood for service, sacrifice and freedom. He was a metaphysician of the Vedanta school. He was one of the great interpreters of the Vedanta philosophy in modern times. He was the first great Hindu of modern period who made persistent and systematic efforts to realise the dream of the universal

propaganda of Hindu religion and philosophy. He drew the essence of Hinduism from Upanishads, the Gita and the Sutra of Vyasa. He used the term Vedanta to cover the systems of thought expounded by Sankaracharya, Ramanuja, Madhava and others and maintained that there was no incompatibility between the various systems of thought.

PIONEER OF NATIONALISM

Swami Vivekananda is considered as one of the prophets of the Indian nationalism because he tried to awaken Indian people who were lying in deep slumber. He wanted to see the emergence of a strong and self confident India which would give the message of the Vedanta to the world. He strongly believed that the Indians should be proud of their rosy history, tradition, culture and religion and should try their level best to reform them. The awakening of the spirit of India was the goal for young people. Hence he advised them to 'arise, awake and stop not till the goal is reached'

Vivekananda believed that there is one all dominating principle manifesting itself in the life of each nation. According to him, religion had been the guiding principle in India's history. He maintained thus: In each nation as in music there is main note, a central theme, upon which all others turn. Each nation has a theme: everything else is secondary. India's theme is religion. Social reform and everything else are secondary'. He worked to build the foundations of a religious theory of nationalism which was later advocated by Bipin Chandra Pal and Aurobindo Ghosh. Vivekananda was the passionate advocate of the religious theory of nationalism because religion, according to him, had to be made the backbone of the national life. He believed that the future greatness of the nation could be built only on the foundations of its past greatness.

Vivekananda was highly critical of the British rule in India because he held that due to their rule Indians lost confidence, famine engulfed the land, farmers and artisans were reduced to poverty and deprived. The British governments, East India Company etc., were exploiting Indians in all spheres of socio- economic activity. Due to discriminatory and

exploitative economic policies of the British government, Indian's could not develop their natural resources and raw materials.

According to Vivekananda, the national regeneration of India would begin when people became fearless and started demanding their rights. He asked the Indians to develop solidarity and oneness of the spirit by the eradication of social evils, superstitions and evils of caste system. He was of the opinion that the evils of caste system divided the Indian society into classes and created the feeling of inferiority and superiority among them. As a prophet of Indian nationalism, Vivekananda held that though there was a variety for languages, cultures and religions in India, there existed a common ground between Indian people. For the Indians religion was unifying force as the spirituality was Blood in the life of India.

Vivekananda was an ardent patriot and had tremendous love for the country. He was the embodiment of emotional patriotism. He had established almost a sense of identity- consciousness with the country, its peoples and its historic ideals'. According to him, it was the duty of the educated Indians to make its knowledge available to the people in their oneness and solidarity. He exhorted Indians not to get involved in the divisive issue of race and language and imbibe the spirit of unity. He said that Hindus should not blame Muslims for their numerous invasions because the Muslim conquest came as a salvation to the downtrodden masses in India. National unity, according to him, could not be fostered by caste conflict but it would be secured by raising the lower to the level of higher classes and not by bringing the upper to the lower level. For the growth of national spirit in India, independence of mind was necessary. Indians should be proud of their motherland and declare that all Indians, despite their caste, linguistic and religious differences, are brothers.

The main component of Vivekananda concept of nationalism is as follows.

1. There was unity and oneness of the Indian people despite their outward diversity.
2. It was necessary to remove the evils of caste system in order to inculcate the spirit of social solidarity.

3. There was similarity in the teachings of different religions and India consisted of all religious communities.
4. National spirit in India could be developed by young people by devoting their life to social service and national awakening.

FREEDOM

One of the important contributions of Vivekananda to political theory is his concept of freedom. He had a comprehensive theory of freedom. According to Vivekananda, freedom is the keynote of spiritual life. The whole universe, he said, in its constant motion represented the dominant quest for freedom. He regarded the light of liberty as the only condition of growth. He not only stood for spiritual freedom but also wanted the material or external freedom of man. He believed in the natural right of man. He declared that liberty does not certainly mean the absence of obstacles in the path of misappropriation of wealth etc, by you and me, but it is our natural right to be allowed to use our own body, intelligence or wealth according to our wills without doing any harm to others, and all the members of society ought to have the same opportunity for obtaining well education or knowledge. According to him, freedom in its total aspects- physical freedom, mental freedom and spiritual freedom- had been the watchwords of the Upanishads.

Vivekananda considered freedom not only for maintaining religious harmony among various religious faiths and for realising the spiritual life by the individuals but he also thought that the individual freedom was equally dispensable for the realisation of his personality in the social and economic spheres. He, therefore, wanted to make freedom as the natural possession of individuals. He inspired that every individual must cultivate a free body mind and spirit. The strength and vitality of society depends on individual initiative and freedom. According to Vivekananda, society was only a social agency and it should not encroach on individual freedom. He held that liberty becomes meaningless without equality or rights. His recognition of the natural rights of an individual, in fact, puts to an end to all kinds of privileges in society and establishes the right to individual equality. However, individual freedom should not be viewed in

an isolated way, and it must be studied in relation to society. In fact, his concept of individual freedom has a bearing on the problems of the individual's relationship with society.

Although Vivekananda concept of freedom was primarily spiritual, he did not ignore the social and material sides of it. To the worldly man, material life is as real as the social life. To deny material life to him is to condemn him to death. Thus, Vivekananda wanted to base the organisation of society on a synthesis of material and spiritual life. It stands for a synthesis of the individual and social freedom, material and spiritual freedom.

CASTE SYSTEM AND SOCIAL CHANGE

Vivekananda social and political ideas followed from his Vedanta conception of the inner self as omnipotent and supreme. He wanted to get rid of all evil ideas of class and caste superiority and tyranny which have made the Hindu society loose, stratified and disintegrated. He mercilessly denounced the evils of untouchability and condemned all forms of inhuman practices prevalent in the traditional Hindu society. However, as a theoretician, Vivekananda rationalised the fourfold Varna divisions. According to him, the fourfold differentiation of the social order represents the ideal type. The Brahman priest stands for the rule of knowledge and the advancement of science. The Kshatriya stands for order. The Vaishya represents commerce and help in the dissemination of knowledge through trade. The Sudra represents the triumph of equality. He believes that if these four dominant principles could be synthesized that will be an ideal condition because the harmony of knowledge, protection, economic activities and equality is to be certainly desired. But this consummation is difficult of realisation because every order seeks to concentrate power in its own hands and that leads to degeneration. The Brahmas, for example, became monopolistic of knowledge and excluded others from the domain of culture. The Kshatriyas became cruel and tyrannical. Hence, Vivekananda rebelled against oppressions and repressions practised by the upper castes with the tacit support of the ruling regimes from time to time.

Vivekananda wanted an overall development of India and the eradication of poverty and degeneration of people. He was an opponent of feudalism and aristocracy. He pleaded for bridging the gap between the rich and the poor. He wanted to awaken the toiling masses (peasants, workers, untouchables etc) of the country. Vivekananda's theory of social change was based on the Indian conception of history. It was a theory of political cycle that visualized periodic and cultural change in the regimes on the basis of law of change, with the history of Greece, Rome and India. He held that in every individual, there prevailed three qualities of knowledge, valour and ignorance and in every society and in every civilisation, there existed four classes of the people. All societies which had developed division of labour had four classes namely Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Sudras.

According to Vivekananda in the first stage of human development, in almost all civilizations of the world, the power was in the hands of Brahmins or the priest. He ruled with the help of magic. His power was overthrown by the Kshatriyas or Warriors who formed monarchical or oligarchic governments. But the power of this class was overthrown by the Vaishyas or traders. He further says that the power of the Vaishyas would be over thrown by the Sudras. As per the law of nature wherever there was an awakening of new and stronger life, there it tried to conquer and take the place of the old and the decaying. Nature favoured the dying of the unfit and the survival of the fittest. The power of the Kshatriyas was brought down because of its dictatorship. He maintained that the real power of the society rested with the Sudras who produced wealth with the help of their labour power. The Sudras would become great not by acquiring the qualities of Brahmins, Kshatriyas or Vaishyas, but by retaining their own qualities as producers of wealth. Thus in the political theory of Vivekananda the awakening and freedom of India was synchronised with the rise of Sudras and workers and peasants to political power.

Vivekananda was a believer in moderation with regard to social change. Social customs are the results of the arrangements of society for

self-preservation. But if these regulations are perpetuated, society may suffer decadence.

VIEWS ON SOCIALISM, COMMUNISM AND DEMOCRACY

Swami Vivekananda was a social realist. He wanted the materialistic and dynamic west to imbibe the spiritual teachings of the yoga and the Vedanta. His message to the Indians was realistic and pragmatic. He was intensely conscious of the miseries of India's millions. His revolutionary statement read thus: It is mockery to offer religion to a starving man. The deep social realism of Vivekananda is also revealed in his statement that India's political slavery of a thousand years is rooted in the suppression of the masses. He mercilessly denounced the sophistication, the arrogance and the wickedness of the upper classes of Indian society. They have been responsible for exploiting the millions of masses throughout India's history. Once Swami Vivekananda declared thus: I am a socialist not because I think it is a perfect system, but half a loaf is better than no bread.' He can be considered a socialist in two senses. First, he had the historical vision to realise that in Indian history there has been the dominance of the two upper castes. The Brahmans and the Kshatriyas. While the later perpetrated political and economic exploitation, the former enchained the masses with new complicated ceremonies and rituals. He openly denounced caste oppressions and refused to recognise any social barrier between man and man. His gospel of social equalitarianism is fundamentally socialistic. Secondly, Vivekananda was a socialist because he championed the concept of equal chance. 'For all the inhabitants of the country. This concept of equal chances definitely in the socialist direction.

Vivekananda was aware of the weaknesses of the western gospels of socialism and anarchism. He was in favour of violent revolution for achieving the goal of socialism. He was a great social realist who was conscious of caste oppressiveness in Indian society and who left the crying urgency of the solution of the problems of food and hunger. Marx stressed the need for an organised proletarian party for transformation from capitalism to socialism. Vivekananda wanted to train individual workers for the social awakening and change in the traditional caste-

ridden Indian society. The fundamental difference between the Vedantic socialism of Vivekananda and Marxism is that although the former stressed the reformation of society, he put greater stress on the elevation of human consciousness into the divine' Marxism was born as a reaction against the disturbing and maladjusted situation created by the industrial revolution. The spiritually- rooted sociological doctrines of Vivekananda with their stress on the cultivation of purity and fraternity have been the restatement of the perennial philosophy of justice, love and universal compassion

Vivekananda was a great advocate of democracy and he wanted to awaken the young people to establish free and democratic government in India. According to him, the principle of liberty was important because there could not be growth in society without liberty. He believes that everyone should have liberty of thought, discussion, food, dress etc. He was a supporter of equality of all men and pleaded for the abolition of caste and class privileges. Caste system was a hindrance to the development of India into a strong nation. Vivekananda's plea for the individual freedom and social equality made him a firm believer in the institution of democracy. The liberation of the masses necessitates their participation in the activities of the government. Democracy, according to him, inculcates faith in self reliance and self – government; it eliminates the dependence of the individual on parliament. He viewed democracy both as a way of life and a form of government. As a way of life, democracy envisages freedom, equality, brother hood and their union. As a form of government he maintained that social evolution was possible through the cyclic rule of the caste system. He believed that democracy encourages individual initiative and self- reliance in administering the affairs of government. Democracy provides for them to uplift themselves and mould their future. He believes that religious tolerance was crucial for the growth of democracy because that alone could promote the cause of liberty, equality and fraternity.

Swami Vivekananda was a great nationalist of India who wanted to revitalize the nation through the vitality of religion. He believed that religion constituted the 'centre, the keynote of the whole of music of

national life of India. He is regarded as the patriot and prophet of modern India. It was due to his message of courage and fearlessness that he was described as 'tamer of souls' and 'cyclonic monk from India'.

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