



Swami Vivekananda: Ideology and Vision for life

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Abstract:

Swami Vivekananda's words touching upon every facet of over nation life, with their freshness and vigor provide answer to questions that agitate both the individuals and society. He was the one who transmitted the grains of Indian culture to the western stigma, and in turn, sucked nectar from its petals to take it home. It was neither unusual nor unnatural, says the author, because living cultures have the capacity to fertilize and to be fertilized in terms, with new ideas and forms. This paper provides a historical outlook regarding the ideology of Swami Vivekananda.

Introduction

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. Swami Vivekananda gave a new opinion that Neo-Vedanta philosophy would increase cultural strength of Hinduism and pave the way for the growth of nationalism in modern India. He interpreted Indian nationalism in the contest of reformation and rejuvenation of Hinduism.

Swami Vivekananda never joined a political party, he was not part of the government or the administration, police or the military, he was neither a worker in the factory nor a farmer, he was a simple monk wearing saffron coloured clothes he never joined a revolutionary organization. But still he became popular and influential. He

influenced the ideas of Yogi Arvind, Lokmanya Tilak and Mahatma Gandhi. Many revolutionaries took inspiration from his ideas.

Vivekananda's contributions to World Culture:

Making an objective assessment of Swami Vivekananda's contributions to world culture, the eminent British historian A L Basham stated that "in centuries to come, he will be remembered as one of the main moulders of the modern world..."

Some of the main contributions that Swami ji made to the modern world are mentioned below:

1. *New Understanding of Religion*: One of the most significant contributions of Swami Vivekananda to the modern world is his interpretation of religion as a universal experience of transcendent Reality, common to all humanity. Swamiji met the challenge of modern science by showing that religion is as scientific as science itself; religion is the 'science of consciousnesses. As such, religion and science are not contradictory to each other but are complementary. This universal conception frees religion from the hold of superstitions, dogmatism, priest craft and intolerance, and makes religion the highest and noblest pursuit – the pursuit of supreme Freedom, supreme Knowledge, and supreme Happiness.
2. *New View of Man*: Vivekananda's concept of 'potential divinity of the soul' gives a new, ennobling concept of man. The present age is the age of humanism which holds that man should be the chief concern and centre of all activities and thinking. Through science and technology man has attained great prosperity and power, and modern methods of communication and travel have

converted human society into a 'global village'. But the degradation of man has also been going on apace, as witnessed by the enormous increase in broken homes, immorality, violence, crime, etc. in modern society. Vivekananda's concept of potential divinity of the soul prevents this degradation, divinizes human relationships, and makes life meaningful and worth living. Swamiji has laid the foundation for 'spiritual humanism', which is manifesting itself through several neo-humanistic movements and the current interest in meditation, Zen etc all over the world.

3. *New Principle of Morality and Ethics:* The prevalent morality, in both individual life and social life, is mostly based on fear – fear of the police, fear of public ridicule, fear of God's punishment, fear of Karma, and so on. The current theories of ethics also do not explain why a person should be moral and be good to others. Vivekananda has given a new theory of ethics and new principle of morality based on the intrinsic purity and oneness of the Atman. We should be pure because purity is our real nature, our true divine Self or Atman. Similarly, we should love and serve our neighbours because we are all one in the Supreme Spirit known as Paramatman or Brahman.

4. *Bridge between the East and the West:* Another great contribution of Swami Vivekananda was to build a bridge between Indian culture and Western culture. He did it by interpreting Hindu scriptures and philosophy and the Hindu way of life and institutions to the Western people in an idiom which they could understand. He made the Western people realize that they had to learn much from Indian spirituality for their own well-being. He showed that, in spite of her poverty and backwardness, India had a great contribution to make to world culture. In this way he was instrumental in ending India's cultural isolation from the rest of the world. He was India's first great cultural ambassador to the West.

On the other hand, Swamiji's interpretation of ancient Hindu scriptures, philosophy, institutions, etc prepared the mind of Indians to accept and apply in practical life two best elements of Western culture, namely science and technology and humanism. Swamiji has taught Indians how to master Western science and technology and at the same time develop spiritually. Swamiji has also taught Indians how to adapt Western humanism (especially the ideas of individual freedom, social equality and justice and respect for women) to Indian ethos.

Problems of India and the solution:

He found a way out of this problem and that was to seek the help of the western developed nations. He was very much aware of their prosperity and development. He considered the spiritual wealth of India as invaluable. What he thought was that India will provide the Vedanta philosophy to the west and in return receive financial and material aid from them.

He went to USA in 1893 (1893-1896 3.5 years) for the Parliament of the world's religion. He changed his name to Vivekananda. He impressed the conference. All religions should try to understand each other – this was his main message. All other people talked about their own God. Vivekananda spoke about the universal God and universal religion. He advocated consensus among all religions. American newspapers upheld him as the most important man in the conference. He established the Vedanta society in USA. On his way back he delivered some lectures in England. He returned back to India in 1896.

The Identity of India as Hindustan:

Swami Vivekananda spoke vigorously on the need for a new Hindustan. He wanted the cultural unity of India to be acknowledged openly by all Indians. Swami ji wanted a renaissance in the Hindu outlook based on Vedanta scriptures, and from it outlined the architecture of Hindu identity. The question "Who are we?" is the first step in this search for that identity. It is an attempt to seek the foundation stone for a new Hindu Renaissance, which is necessary for discarding dysfunctional trappings of the past. In World's Parliament of Religions, Chicago Swami Vivekananda emphasized the common points agreed by all the Indian-born religions (or Indic religions):

"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 Buddhists, and the atheism of the Jains, each and all have a place in the Hindu's religion."

Swami Vivekananda listed seven common points of Hindu and other Indic [India born] religions:

1. Religion is received through revelation, the Vedas. By Vedas no books are meant. They mean the accumulated treasury of spiritual laws discovered by different sages in different bodies.
2. Creation is without beginning or end. Creation and creator can be likened to two lines without beginning and without end.
3. We are a spirit living in a body. We are not the body.
4. The present is determined by our past actions and the future by the present. There must have been causes before the present birth to make a man miserable or happy and those were his past actions. Also the natural habits of a new-born soul must have come from past lives.
5. The soul in its very essence is free, unbounded, holy, pure and perfect. But the soul will go on evolving up or reverting back from birth to birth and death to death.
6. Worship Him, the God Almighty, through love, love for the love's sake without preconditions or expectation.

7. The whole object is by constant struggle to become perfect, to become divine, to reach God and see God. We can have the experience of God in this life.

It has been scientifically established in the research of p. Ramana Gutala and Denise Carvalhosilva (published in the renowned Human Genes journal, Sept.2006, VI. 120 543-51), titled "A Shared Y-Chromoosomal Heritage between Muslims and Hindus", that Hindus and Muslims have the same DNA structure. Parsis, Indian Jews and Christians do not deny Hindu ancestry.

Dr. B.R. Ambedkar also presenting same views in his research paper "Castes in India; Their Mechanism, Genesis, and Development" in 1916 stated

"I venture to say that there is no country that can rival the Indian Peninsula with respect to the unity of its culture. It has not only a geographical unity, but it has over and above all a deeper and much more fundamental unity - the indubitable cultural unity that covers the land from end to end".

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 emphasise 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.

Caste System and Social Change:

Vivekananda rationalized 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 Shudra 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 realization 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 practiced 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 civilization, there existed four classes of the people. All societies which had developed division of labor had four classes namely Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas and Shudras.

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 favored 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 Shudras who produced wealth with the help of their labor power. Swami Vivekananda predicted that the rule of the upper castes is almost over and in the near future the lower castes or the Shudras will rule. A Shudra rule is imminent. For ages the

upper castes have dominated and exploited the lower castes. Now the lower caste people are enlightened and very soon they will take over political, economic and social 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.

Conclusion:

Many philosophers took birth in India from time to time who continued with the tradition of ancient Vedic saints. Swami Vivekananda was liaison between the east and the west- a pollinating agent. The present study will definitely through life amidst this encircling gloom and our efforts would be fruitful, ' if the fiery words in these pages set ablaze even a few young hurts for their own welfare and for the happiness of many. Thus we are responsible for what we are and whatever we wish ourselves to be. One have the power to make ourselves .what we are now has been the result of our own past actions because human body is the greatest body in the universe and human being the greatest being. This world is the great gymnasium where one came to make ourselves strong through the ideology of Vivekananda.

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