CHAPTER IV

VIVEKANANDA’S CONCEPTION OF THE
DIGNITY OF THE HUMAN PERSON
A METAPHYSICAL PERSPECTIVE
In this chapter, we are going to give a detailed exposition of Vivekananda's conception of human dignity founded on the Vedantic conception of the divinity of the human being and oneness of humanity. We are going to deal with the topics such as divinity and dignity, the apparent and real man, to be human is to be free, freedom and dignity, perfection and dignity, man as the maker of his destiny, and Raja-Yoga.

**MAN, DIVINITY AND DIGNITY**

Vivekananda holds that the human being is the greatest of all beings in the universe. Man is higher than not only animals but even angels. Man is greater than even the Gods (Devas). Gods also have to come down to the level of man to attain the ultimate liberation. Gods cannot attain moksha as they are. They have to
attain salvation through the human body only. But the human being can achieve the goal straight away. According to the Jews, God created man after the creation of the angels. Then he asked the angels to salute the human being he created. All but one angel by name Iblis refused to salute. God crushed him to the lower level. Iblis became Satan. This shows that the human birth is the greatest of all births.

The truth of the above episode is that even God, the creator, gave higher place to the human person. It is because man has the potential to become the realized soul whereas the angels and Gods have to take the birth of the human being to achieve salvation. The animals too cannot achieve freedom, for they are made up of Tamas. So they are dull and they cannot have any noble thoughts. The angels and Gods are made up of Rajas. They indulge in the life of extravagance. It is only the man who is manufactured out of the Sattva quality which is essential to attain the final value, namely, liberation from sorrow. Vivekananda says that the animals and the Gods are on the extremes. The former are like the poor and the latter are like the wealthy in the society. The poor and the wealthy cannot go for higher levels of life. He says, "The lower creation, the animals, is dull, and manufactured mostly out of Tamas. Animals cannot have any high thoughts; nor can the angels or Devas attain to direct freedom without human birth. In human society, in the same way, too much wealth or too much
poverty is a great impediment to the higher development of the soul. It is from the middle classes that the greatest ones of the world come. Here the forces are very equally adjusted and balanced.\textsuperscript{1}

According to Swami Vivekananda man is essentially the same everywhere. The differences among people are superficial. The differences in dress and food are on the surface only. Differences in manners, customs and habits are circumstantial. Despite dissimilarities, man is man all over the world. The same wonderful nature is represented everywhere in every man. This is what the Vedanta philosophy has advocated since time immemorial. The Vedanta is very ancient and perennial. It is the outcome of the Aryan literature called the Vedas. \textquote{It is, as it were, the very flower of all the speculations and experiences and analyses, embodied in that mass of literature- collected and culled through centuries.}\textsuperscript{2}

The distinctive characteristic of the Vedanta philosophy is that it is truly impersonal in the sense that it was not authored by any one person. The Vedas were not revealed to any one prophet. They do not build themselves around any one master. This is what is meant by the Vedas being perfectly impersonal. Another peculiarity of the Vedas, according to Vivekananda, is that they do not oppose the philosophies propounded by others. They do not have anything to say against the religions which are formulated by
certain persons. The Vedas never claimed for themselves any authority. They do not preach the ideas that are antagonistic to any religion that came later on. They are so accommodative that they are in a way tolerant to the sects like Buddhism, Christianity and Islam. These religions have been the products of certain persons. Buddhism was the product of the Buddha, Christianity taught by the Christ and Islam was preached by the prophet Mohammad. These religions have a particular teacher. They owe their origin and allegiance to them. "But the Vedanta philosophy stands at the background of all the various sects, and there is no fight and no antagonism between the Vedanta and any other system in the world," says Vivekananda.

The central principle of the Vedanta is that man is divine. It claims that this principle is common to every other philosophy. It is found in every religion of the world. Every where man is divine. All that we see around us is the manifestation of the divinity. It is the outcome of the divine consciousness. Anything that is there in man is a part of that consciousness. The strong, the powerful, the good or the noble in human nature is the product of that divinity. This divinity is potentially there in everyone. So there is essentially no difference between human beings. All are essentially alike. Vivekananda says that the divinity is like an infinite ocean behind us. And we are like the so many waves arising out of the vast ocean of divinity. Each one of us is trying his or her best to manifest the
divinity outside. Irrespective of the caste or creed, each one of us has in us the infinite ocean of Existence, Knowledge and Bliss (Satt, Chit and Ananda). Divinity is our birthright and real nature. The differences among people are superficial and caused by the circumstances. They are also due to the greater or lesser manifestation of the inner divine power. It manifests fully in all if all are given equal opportunities to manifest it. It is ignorant to discriminate between people and suppress some to the level of being beasts. Vivekananda says, "Therefore the Vedanta lays down that each man should to be treated not as what he manifests, but as what he stands for. Each human being stands for the divine, and therefore, every teacher should be helpful, not by condemning man, but by helping him to call forth the divinity that is within him."4

The Vedanta also says that everything that is there in society is the result of the manifestation of the inner divinity. It manifests in all planes of our action. The divinity is the root cause of our ideas and source of our actions. The Vedantins call it "the expiration of man."5 The other religions call it inspiration in us. Although the Vedantins call it by a different name, they are not in opposition to those who call it inspiration. They do not quarrel with those who fail to properly understand the nature of divinity in us. All sects have accepted that every person is trying to unfold the divinity consciously or unconsciously. Vivekananda further
says that the human being has an infinite spring coiled in him. It is always trying to emerge outside and unfold itself in many ways. The social phenomenon is the consequence of the efforts of the inner spirit to manifest. But the crises in the society are not the cause of the unfoldment of the inner spirit. They are also not the effects of that unfoldment. The struggles we see in the society are only the co-existent phenomena of the spirit. They can therefore be easily eradicated. The evils in society are neither the causes nor effects of the manifestation of the inward reality. The evil is not in any way related to good. The spirit is not touched by the material. The material circumstances and the evils try to block the manifestation of the spirit. But the wise can easily remove them and pave the way for the unfoldment. The moment these barriers are removed, the spirit shines forth in us. Vivekananda says, "As one of our greatest philosophers says- in the case of the irrigation of a field, the tank is somewhere upon a higher level, and the water is trying to rush into the field, and is barred by a gate. But as soon as the gate is opened, the water rushes in by its own nature; and if there is dust and dirt in the way the water rolls over them. But dust and dirt are neither the result nor the cause of this unfolding of the divine nature of man. They are co-existent circumstances, and, therefore, can be remedied."  

The idea that the human being is divine can be found in all the religions of the world. But in some of the religions this sacred
idea has been expressed through mythologies. In some other
religions this idea has been symbolized through images. The
manifestation is multifarious. It is of the form of the divine in the
human being. It is nothing but the expression of that infinite
oneness in the human person. The ethics, the customs and the
conventions are also its expressions. Our acts of goodness are the
expressions of infinitude only. The truth of this idea can be
understood in the moments when we feel oneness with the
universe. Every one of us experiences such moments of unity with
the cosmos. We rush forth to express the feeling of unity knowingly
or unknowingly. Vivekananda calls this expression of oneness as
love. He calls this sense of unity with all as sympathy. It is the
foundation of our ethics and morality. The Vedanta philosophy
has taught this noble idea of oneness in the form of the famous
statement 'You are That'. There is absolutely no difference between
the oneness and human person. The difference is the creation of
ignorance. The multiplicity is illusory. Unity and oneness are the
only reality that exists universally and eternally. "This is summed
up in the Vedanta philosophy by the celebrated aphorism, Tat
Tvam Asi, That Thou Art," says Vivekananda.

The Vedanta has taught this truth to the world from time
immemorial. It has spread the message that you are one with the
Universal Being. Every soul that exists is not different from my
soul. My soul is the same as yours and vice versa. Similarly, my
body is the body of the other. The bodies have the same spirit underlying them. So there is no basic difference between our bodies. The Vedanta has a lesson to teach us through the truth of oneness. The moral lesson is that it is wrong to discriminate between people. It is unethical to hurt others. One is hurting oneself in hurting others. So also, in loving oneself one is loving others. In loving others one is in fact loving oneself. The truth is that the love we give comes back to us. The good that comes out from us is found to return to us. This is so because all beings are bound together by the one infinite truth. The universal spirit is the underlying reality of all of us. Vivekananda says, "For I am the universe; this universe is my body. I am the infinite, only I am not conscious of it now; but I am struggling to get this consciousness of the Infinite, and perfection will be reached when full consciousness of this Infinite comes."

Elaborating further the Vedantic conception of the divinity of the human person, Vivekananda maintains that the Vedanta is not against the infinite variations in religions. We must admit the differences in religious thought. The differences are only the diversified manifestations of the same infinite consciousness. It is not correct to think of bringing everyone to the same idea of religion. It is ignorance to try to bring all people to the same opinion. There is no need to make all persons to believe in the same Gods, the same scriptures and the same principles. There is
no need for all to follow the same pattern of life, since the goal of all is the same. The Vedantists metaphorically explain that the many rivers have different sources in different mountains. They flow down crossing several different places but they culminate in the ocean ultimately.

Similarly, the various sects and creeds have their own standpoints. The different religions have different sources but they finally come to the same God. Vivekananda opines that the Vedanta, as a manifestation of the Infinite, has influenced Buddhism. Buddhism is the first missionary religion in the world. Christianity is also a missionary religion. So it can be said that Buddhism might have influenced the Christianity in its missionary aspect. Since Buddhism was influenced by the Vedanta, it can be said that the Vedanta has indirectly influenced Christianity. The Vedanta has influenced Christianity through the Alexandrians, the Gnostics and the Western Philosophy. It has also influenced greatly the German thought. Thereby it has revolutionized the Western philosophy and psychology. But the influence of Vedanta on the West is very much unperceived. Its influence on the whole world is unnoticed. It is true to say that the Vedantic impact on humanity is imperceptive. But it is also true that the impact has done a lot of good to humanity. It has enhanced the dignity of the human person through spiritual transformation. It is by revealing the spirit that is common to humanity that the Vedanta brought about
equality of all. The change it has brought about is not superficial but fundamental. It has also far reaching consequences for social change. So Vivekananda categorically says that "this divine philosophy has been spread through the world for the good of mankind."9

Further, the Vedanta has taught the message of equality and dignity of the human being without force. It did not use armies and resort to religious persecution to spread its message. It did not advocate reviling of other religions but taught the principle that the basis of all religions is the same. People all over the world are the same and it is our duty to help them without any motive, without causing injury. Hinduism therefore has deep reverence for all the religions of the world. The history shows that India sheltered the Hebrews, the Jews and the Persians in the past. It welcomed the Christians who came here with St. Thomas, the chief disciple of Jesus Christ. They were all allowed to settle in India and hold their opinions and practice their principles. The descendants of these groups still exist in India and enjoy the freedom and dignity in their own right. The Hindus have not treated them as aliens and inferior to them. This is all due to the Vedantic spirit of tolerance arising out of its philosophy of the indivisibility of humanity. "And this spirit of toleration has not died out. It will not and cannot die there."10 The Vedanta takes the person to the highest level where he or she cannot see any difference among the human beings.
Once an individual realizes the oneness, he or she sees neither man nor woman, neither sect nor creed. He does not see any differentiations as colour or birth. He goes beyond all these limitations and "finds that divinity which is the real man behind every human being."¹¹

Thus the Vedanta has the greatest lesson to teach for us. The lesson is the universal brotherhood of humanity. Every one has to strive to realize the brotherhood of humanity. We should also allow others to reach the same goal. We have to be open for the manifestation of the divine in us. The divine influence unfolds itself in every one when our eyes are open to it. It is also necessary to keep our hearts purified for the divine to manifest. Only then shall we be in a position to establish the dignity of the human person all over the world.

THE APPARENT AND THE REAL MAN

According to the Vedantic conception as advocated by Vivekananda, apparently the human beings are different from each other. They appear to be separate depending on the factors of space and time. The people are different in name and form and they appear to be changing and impermanent. They are finite incomplete and of imperfect qualities. They also appear to be relative and bound by their circumstances and actions. But in reality human being is the Self which is never changing.
The real person is the substance that is all pervading in the universe. We are the Brahman which appears to be manifold by the interposition of name and form. Behind the apparent fleeting nature, we are in reality the one unit of Existence. The differences are like the waves on the sea which is one vast reality. The sea is one but the form of the wave and the name by which we call it creates the differences on it. When the form and name are removed, the sea remains to be as one unit of existence. The difference between the waves and the sea is not real but only apparent. There is in fact no "I" and 'You'. The idea of duality is illusion. It is ignorance to regard duality and difference as real. But a person of knowledge can easily discriminate between what is real and what is false. Treating the false as real, the finite as infinite or the relative as the absolute is like mistaking the rope for a snake. We mistake the one for the other due to lack of knowledge and favourable circumstances. When once we see things in proper light and with discrimination we see them as they are. We treat truth as truth and false as false. Vivekananda says, "As when the Sun shines upon millions of globules of water, upon each particle is seen a most perfect representation of the Sun, so the one Soul, the one self, the one Existence or the Universe, being reflected on all those numerous globules of varying names and forms, appears to be various. But it is in reality only one. There is no 'I' nor 'you'; it is all one. It is either all 'I' or all 'you'. This idea of duality, of
two, is entirely false, and the whole universe, as we ordinarily know it, is the result of this false knowledge. When discrimination comes and man finds there are not two but one, he finds that he is himself this universe. It is I when am this universe as it now exists, a continuous mass of change. It is I who am beyond all changes, beyond all qualities, the eternally perfect, the eternally blessed.”

Vivekananda contends that Maya is the cause of difference among the human beings. Absence of freedom and dignity is due to Maya. It is Maya that is the source of superiority and inferiority of the people. The sense of caste and privilege is also due to Maya. We subject people to disrespect and indignity because we look at them with a sense of duality and difference. Duality and difference do not exist in reality. They are the creations of the mind. They are only of name and form. They are Maya, the illusion. Maya will vanish when once we see through the name and form which give rise to it. They cannot be said to exist on their own. Maya too has no existence of its own. It is only the appearance of the Substance. But it exists to the extent it makes for the difference. In one sense it exists and in another sense it does not exist. However, for the one who sees the one Reality of oneself and that of the whole universe, there is no Maya. There are no name and form which make for difference. When the mind is still and perfectly silent, there is no difference. There is neither change nor decay. “You are a mind, I am a mind, everyone is a mind; and the very same
universe viewed from the standpoint of knowledge, when the eyes have been cleared of delusions, when the mind has become pure, appears to be the unbroken Absolute Being, the ever pure, the unchangeable, the immortal."13

Human being is the Infinite. We are the eternal spirit which is neither born nor dies. The Self is the omnipresent and it is everywhere. The question of birth and death does not apply to it, male or female, superior or inferior is not relevant to it. All the changes are applicable to Nature which is of difference whereas the Spirit is ever the same. The differences among people are hallucinations and they are of our own making. Nobody is born a superior or inferior and we manufacture the differences we see. The real nature is that which is not manufactured and it transcends all kinds of differences. It is higher than anything we can imagine, more infinite than the infinite space and more omnipresent than the omnipresent. The state of absolute perfection is the real nature of the human being. In this state, the person is fearless, free and dignified. He or she is free from all delusions and miseries. He is beyond birth and death, pains and pleasures and the mind and body also. To the real person even the whole universe disappears and only the spirit remains to be. Everything gets transfigured into one infinite and unchangeable existence. The enlightened one knows that he or she is one with that unbreakable existence. So the differences which belong to name and form are not real. They
are temporary and adventitious and they are like the clouds that are passing away before the immutable sky. Swami says, "Even as clouds of various colours come before the sky, remain there for a second and then vanish away, even so before this soul are all these visions coming, of earths and heavens, of the moon and the gods, of pleasures and pains; but they all pass away leaving the one infinite, blue, unchangeable sky. The sky never changes; it is the clouds that change. It is a mistake to think that the sky is changed. It is a mistake to think that we are impure, that we are limited, that we are separate. The real man is the one unit of Existence."14

The oneness of humanity is not a mere theory or a philosophy. It is possible to realize the truth of oneness and there have been several people who have realized the truth of the oneness. To the person who attains knowledge the world of division and difference disappears. Such a person becomes free while being alive, here and now (Jivanmukta). He is the one who has seen through the mirage of illusion. He discriminates the sharp distinction between the reality of oneness and the mirage of difference. He has realized the Self that is beyond all limitations, physical as well as mental. As it has been mentioned elsewhere in this thesis, freedom is the true nature of the Self. Freedom is the birth right and shines through the world of differences, the veil of matter.
The human being is really and already free and the real man cannot but be free. It is only under the influence of Maya that we become bound and it is only at level of name and form that we see the differences. Vivekananda says that even free will is the product of Maya. Free will is a misnomer and will can never be free since it comes into existence only when we are bound. True freedom is beyond will which can never be free since it works in the field of nature which is bound. So it is wrong to think that we are free because we exercise will. Freedom of the will is not real, since it works within the bounds of nature. Real freedom is indeed the basis of free will and it is boundless and beyond laws including the will. Vivekananda says, "The will of man is bound, but that which is the foundation of that will is eternally free. So, even in the state of bondage which we call human life or god-life, on earth or in heaven, there yet remains to us that recollection of the freedom which is ours by divine right. And consciously or unconsciously we are all struggling towards it. When a man has attained his own freedom, how can he be bound by any law? No law in this universe can bind him, for this universe itself is his."\textsuperscript{15}

The person who is free in the real sense cannot have the ideas about the sex, caste, class or nation. Such a person cannot say that he is a man, women, a Brahmin or a sudhra. To him or her all these differences are lies only and he cannot differentiate between the rights of man or women. Indeed, nobody exists in
isolation from others and all people are one and united. The Self is sexless, eternally pure and it is beyond caste, race or nation. To the person who has realized the Self, the whole world is his or her country and the universe is his or hers.

Vivekananda says that it is not enough to preach the oneness of the spirit and the oneness of humanity. One has to actually realize it and practice it in daily life. It is no use to preach the doctrine of oneness and practice difference. People proclaim the Advaita but practice discrimination to the extent of untouchability. We treat some people as untouchables and exclude and segregate them from the mainstream of life. We put them to indignities and endless sorrow. We treat them as slaves and deprive them of dignity. We betray them of their humanity and treat them as being inferior to beasts. We do not realize the truth that differences are only the conditioned manifestations. They are only the external coating which is evil. The person who has really realized oneness never treats others as being different from himself or herself. He or she treats others as he treats himself or herself. He treats all with freedom and dignity. He treats the other as an autonomous person who is of the nature of humanity as well as divinity. The very presence of such a person is a blessing to society. He need not do anything in particular to others. Nevertheless he does whatever is good to others. He is incapable of doing evil deeds. Vivekananda says, "Such a man will, by his very presence, change even the
wicked persons into saints. Even if he does not speak, his very presence will be a blessing to mankind. Can such men do evil; can they do wicked deeds? There is, you must remember, all the difference between realization and mere talking. Talking is one thing and realization is another. Philosophies, and doctrines, and arguments, and books, and theories, and churches, and sects, and all these things are good in their own way; but when that realization comes, these things drop away.... So those that have realized truth do not require the ratiocinations of logic and all other gymnastics of the intellect to make them understand the truth; it is to them the life of their lives concretized, made more than tangible.”

Vivekananda is of the view that the person who has realized the truth of oneness ceases to be self centred. He or she bestows the least thought on his or her individuality. He finds the other as a respectable and dignified being. He finds that the object of his love is not any low or little thing. To him the other is not “a clod of earth, but it is the veritable God Himself.” The husband treats the wife with love only when he thinks that the wife is Goddess herself. Similarly the wife will love the husband more only when she thinks that the husband is God himself. Same is the case with the employer and the employed, the teacher and the student. There will be no sense of superiority or inferiority in relationship. The mother treats the children as divine incarnations.
The person who has realized the truth will love even the greatest enemy as the God. He loves even the unholiest of men since he knows that the unholiest is God himself. He becomes a world mover, for his little self exists no longer. To him, the whole world has become completely transfigured. The world of the realized people will be altogether different. It will not be a world of misery and pain. There will be struggle and conflict in it. People do not fight for a morsel of bread. They do not put themselves to indignities and ill treatment. The world of the enlightened people will not be a prison-house of pain but a playground of joy. It will be a beautiful world devoid of conflict and violence. It will be free of all friction and clashing. There will be no more fighting and quarreling in the world. There will be a religion of peace and plenty. The brutality of treating the other as an object will vanish. The attitude of belittling the poor will disappear. The world of the realized souls will be devoid of the evils like hatred, jealousy and envy. It will be free from the problems of exploitation and exclusion. The other is no more an evil but God himself. As Vivekananda puts it, "Gods will live then upon this earth. This earth will then become heaven, and what evil can there be when gods are playing with gods, when gods are working with gods, and gods are loving gods? That is the great utility of divine realization. Everything that you see in society will be changed and transfigured then. No more will you think of man as evil; and that is the first
great gain. No more will you stand up sneeringly, cast a glance at
a poor man or woman who has made a mistake. No more, ladies,
will you look down with contempt upon the poor woman who walks
the street in the night, because you will see there God Himself. No
more will you think of jealousy and punishments. They will all
vanish; and love, the great ideal of love will be so powerful that no
whip and cord will be necessary to guide mankind aright.  

Thus, Vivekananda argues that if the humanity today
realizes even a glimpse of that great religious truth, the whole world
would be a different place. If people say that we are all God the
world will change within no time. People should stop throwing the
bomb-shells of hatred at the lowly. We should stop projecting
currents of evil thoughts at the downtrodden. We should begin to
see all people, and the animals and birds as the manifestations of
one Almighty. Once the truth is established in oneself, one can no
more see evil in others. One sees evil in others only when the evil
is there in oneself. It is only the thief or the murderer who sees evil
in the good. To the one who is good, all evil will vanish.

Vivekananda holds that the grand truths the ancient India
taught should be spread to everyone. They should be broadcast all
over the world. They should not be allowed to be the exclusive
possession of a few. They should be the common property of both
the high and the low, the saint and the sinner, and the learned and
the ignorant. The truth 'Thou art That' eliminates all the
differences among the people. It will give freedom and equality to all. It will restore the right to live with dignity. Devoid of the realisation of the truth of oneness no amount of politicization will hold. No amount of legislation can give humanity freedom and dignity. The truth ‘Thou art That’ should permeate and pulsate all over the world. It should be the living truth of our life-world. Vivekananda says, “This is the greatest gain to society. This is the great gain to the human organism. These thoughts were thought out, worked out amongst individuals in ancient times in India. For various reasons, such as the exclusiveness of the teachers and foreign conquest, those thoughts were not allowed to spread. Yet they are grand truths; and wherever they have been working, man has become divine.”

**TO BE HUMAN IS TO BE FREE**

Swami Vivekananda holds that freedom is the essential nature of the human being. Freedom distinguishes the living beings from the machines. Even a huge machine is a dead thing when compared to an insect. Even a small worm is superior to a locomotive because the former is free and the latter is not. The worm has intelligence whereas the machine does not. The insect is a living something while the locomotive is only an engine. One has life and the other is only a dead matter. The machine and its power and speed are of a mechanical contrivance. Compared to the huge locomotive, the small worm is a majestic being. "It is a
small part of the Infinite and therefore, it is greater than this powerful engine," says Vivekananda.

Distinguishing further between the living and the dead, he says that the living is that which is not bound. Unlike the dead and the bound, the living beings are not only free but strive for more and more freedom. The dead machine performs its actions mechanically as its maker programmed it to perform. Its movements are not similar to those of a living being. The human being is the most intelligent being of all. We are the most free of all beings. We are also potential enough realize the ultimate freedom and intelligence. We are the most nearest to the realization of Infinite Being of which are the part. "In the living there is freedom, there is intelligence; in the dead all is bound and no freedom is possible, because there is no intelligence. This freedom that distinguishes us from mere machines is what we are all striving for. To be more free is the goal of all our efforts, for only in perfect freedom can there be perfection."21

Vivekananda holds that the human person is striving for perfection. As a being of freedom, we are capable of attaining perfection. All our thoughts and actions are aimed at achieving it. All forms of our worship are aimed at attaining perfection. All human beings are seeking it knowingly or unknowingly. History of humanity stands a testimony to this fact. There is an effort in everybody to attain freedom which is perfection. Even the rudest of
the humankind in their worship of ghosts, demons and the spirits are seeking for more freedom. They worship serpents, tribal gods and the departed forefathers and believe that these beings are greater than themselves. They feel that in some unknown way the beings they worship are more powerful. So they propitiate these beings thinking that they limit their freedom. They worship them to prevent them from molesting them. "They also seek to win favour from these superior beings, to get by gift of the gods what ought to be earned by personal effort."22

Humanity is striving to achieve the extraordinary. We are running after and expecting a miraculous to happen. Human mind is ceaselessly inquiring into the meaning of life which is hidden. The very mind is a ceaseless investigation into the mystery of life. So people all over the world, belonging to all religions are seeking the extraordinary for thousands of years. Even the Jews were concerned with this issue. Vivekananda says that there is the universal dissatisfaction in us, despite the striving for the miraculous. We have the ideal of perfection before us. But we have only gone half way towards it. This is because we do not have enough power of concentration to achieve the greatest idea. The mind is distracted from the ideal since it invents another ideal after pursuing the first one half way. We struggle hard to reach a certain goal and later on we discover that we do not want it. We invent another ideal and we get dissatisfied even with it. As the change of
ideals continues, dissatisfaction also continues to be for ever. Vivekananda says that dissatisfaction is universal because freedom is the aim of every person. All encompassing dissatisfaction is a testimony to the fact that everybody is after freedom more and more. "What is the meaning of universal dissatisfaction? It is because freedom is every man's goal. He seeks it ever, his whole life is a struggle after it. The child rebels against law as soon as it is born. Its first utterance is a cry, a protest against bondage in which it finds itself."\(^2\)

Vivekananda maintains that human being's constant struggle for freedom implies that there is a Being who is absolutely free. The unending longing is an indication for the existence of total freedom. Vivekananda calls the Being who is absolutely free as God. Being in conformity with the teachings of the Vedanta, Vivekananda equates it with \textit{Sat-Chit-Ananda} (Existence-Knowledge-Bliss). He regards it as the highest concept of God which is the fundamental element of the human person. This is the most perfect concept of God that the human mind can imagine. This is the best possible idea of God that our mind can possibly conceive. It is so because it is the essence of knowledge and bliss. The human urge to attain the God is curtailed by the laws of nature. Human nature of becoming the divine is being stifled by following the law of nature. The inner voice has long been suppressed. But yet the human instinct is constantly rebelling
against the laws of nature. There has been the unconscious effort of the human being to attain the highest. Vivekananda says, "We may not understand what the meaning is, but there is that unconscious struggle of the human with the spiritual, of the lower with the higher mind, and the struggle attempts to preserve one's separate life, what we call our individuality."24

Vivekananda is of the view that human beings are born rebels. We rebel against the law of nature and cry out 'No law for us'. We remain to be machines as long as we obey the laws. But nature goes on its own course. We cannot break the movement of the universe. Its laws become the nature of the human person. But we struggle to break them. This struggle to break the bond of nature is the first inkling of life. We strive to attain the higher levels of life. We want to liberate our soul from nature. Vivekananda says, "Freedom, O Freedom! Freedom, O Freedom! Is the song of the soul. Bondage, alas, to be bound in nature, seems its fate."25 Primitive people searched for freedom in worshipping serpents, ghosts and demons. They tried to find meaning through various creeds and forms of life. They endeavoured to understand life and explain it. Man's ceaseless pursuit after freedom is not vain. Vivekananda says that even science is an attempt to gain freedom. Knowledge of science is gained for attaining freedom from nature. Science is man's endeavour to discover the laws of nature. It is to conquer nature by understanding its laws. It is true that
everything in the universe from the Sun to the atom is bound by the laws. Human beings are part of nature. Yet we are indeed not bound by its laws. The soul is above nature and its laws. There is the conception that God is a perfectly free Being. The human person has to attain that being. We cannot eternally remain to be in the bondage. We have to reach the higher levels of life. We should liberate ourselves and struggle for salvation. "Man says to himself, I am a born slave, I am bound; nevertheless, there is a Being who is not bound by nature. He is free and Master of nature."26

The idea of God as a free Being is the fundamental and essential part of life. It is the outcome of the idea of freedom. It is a testimony to the fact that every being is endowed with the effort to become free. Even the plant has an idea of freedom within it. Even the worm has to rise to the level of a free being. Each being is unconsciously working to protect its individuality. The plant strives to preserve its variety and struggles to overcome the laws of nature. So there is in life the eternal conflict between freedom and bondage. Both the ideas are working together but the fight against bondage is going on eternally. Each individual is striving for his or her freedom. Each creed is struggling to retain its identity. There seems to be conflict between the individuals or creeds in the struggle for freedom. But we have to understand the fact that we all are striving to reach the same goal. So we need not fight among
ourselves. There need not be conflict between religions or sects. Every being has a right to live and every group has a place in this society. Vivekananda says, "Onward goes the idea of the material world, onward moves the idea of freedom. Still the fight goes on. We are hearing about all the quarrels of creeds and sects, yet creeds and sects are just and proper, they must be there. The chain is lengthening and naturally the struggle increases, but there need be no quarrels if we only know that we are all striving to reach the same goal."27

Vivekananda reiterated that God is the embodiment of freedom and the master of nature. It is impossible to reject his existence. We cannot move or even live without his grace. Since God is synonymous with freedom it can be said that we cannot survive without freedom. Freedom is as real as the fact of our being bound by nature. Just as the light and shadow, good and evil, there is freedom and bondage. Freedom is hidden in bondage. In human beings, consciousness has been longing for the highest kind of freedom, namely, spiritual freedom. In all the efforts of the human beings, the divine is dimly shining through the veil of ignorance. There is "the radiant fire of freedom and perfection"28 behind the veil of ignorance. Man is the personification of freedom and perfection embodied in one Free Being. The entire universe is the manifestation of this Being. But the human being has yet to know that the universe is the one Being. The differences that we
see are only conceptual. They are only in degree and not in reality. Knowledge is essential for overcoming the bondage of nature and its multiplicity. The more we are knowledgeable the more we are the masters of nature. "The more we are knowing, the more we are becoming masters of nature. Masters alone are making us strong and if there is some being entirely free and master of nature, that being must have a perfect knowledge of nature, must be omnipresent and omniscient. Freedom must go hand in hand with these, and that being alone who has acquired these will be beyond nature."  

**FREEDOM AND DIGNITY**

Swami Vivekananda is of the view that freedom is the prerequisite of dignity. Freedom from 'within' is of primary importance for a person to lead a life of dignity. Freedom 'without' is complementary to freedom from 'within'. An individual lives a fully dignified life when he or she is free both from 'within' and 'without'. Freedom from within is the realization of the truth that one is the spirit. Freedom without is the consequence of the social reform comprising legal and political measures. The former is the result of self-knowledge. It comes out of the realization that we really are the Self. The self is the "I", the eternal subject which never becomes the object. It is not bound by external causes-natural or social. Internal freedom implies the unconditioned state of mind. Nothing can act on it or condition it. Identifying with the
Self is the freedom. Identifying with the body is the bondage. The Self is beyond all laws whereas the body is bound by them. It is like the butter which cannot be contaminated by the water in which it is put. The world cannot condition the Self that is liberated from it. Dignity lies in being free of the bondage of the body and the world. Vivekananda says, "When man really identifies himself with the One, the Atman, everything is possible to him and all matter becomes his servant."³⁰

Vivekananda holds that only the Self can be free. Only the immortal can be free in the real sense of the term. As mortals, human beings can never be free. Freedom and mortality are a contradiction in terms. Only the one who has attained immortality is free. Only the one who has attained divinity is free. And only the one who has realized divinity assumes dignity in the deepest sense of the term. *Atman* is our real essence which is our inner freedom. Without realizing it, there is no freedom and dignity. Realization of the Self is the touchstone of freedom and dignity. Dignity achieved through the realization of the Self is beyond the question of rights and duties.

Dignity which is gained through the knowledge of the Self is the birth right of the human person. The idea of right in the political and legal sense is a limitation. To think that one is free and dignified just because he or she has the rights given by the state is a delusion. Enjoyment of political and social rights implies
limited freedom. Only the one who has seen unity and oneness is truly free and dignified. Oneness and unity means freedom and dignity. Division and exclusion means bondage. Bondage means absence of dignity. Vivekananda says, "The idea of 'right' is a limitation; there is really no "mine" and "thine", for I am thou and thou art I. We have 'responsibility', not 'rights', we should say 'I am the universe', not 'I am John' or 'I am Mary'. These limitations are all delusions and are what holds us in bondage, for, as soon as I think, 'I am John', I want exclusive possession of certain things and begin to say "me" and "mine", and continually make new distinctions in so doing. So our bondage goes on increasing with every fresh distinctions, and we get further and further away from the central unity, the undivided Infinite."31

It is knowledge (jnana) that gives the person freedom and dignity. Ignorance is the mark of bondage and slavery. Knowledge reveals to man what he really is and gives freedom which nothing can constrain. This freedom is beyond the sense of duty. The really free man does good spontaneously. Being beyond the sense of division and superstition, the free man is beyond the causes that constrain his dignity. Only when we free ourselves from name and form, then only we escape from bondage. Freedom implies going beyond all differentiation and reaching the sameness. "Freedom can never be of name and form, of the related. No form can say, I
am free as a form. Not until all idea of form is lost, does freedom come. If our freedom hurts others, we are not free there.\footnote{32}

Freedom is the innate dignity of the human person. Freedom rooted in the knowledge gives us the dignity imbued with divinity. But the freedom is curtailed by the laws and superstitions. Knowledge that one is eternally free is smothered by the factious ideas. Conventions, beliefs and habits reduce the person to automation. They bind the person and blind him or her to inner being. Freedom is the real nature of the human person. It is revealed by the knowledge. It is acquired by the discovery of the spiritual truth. It is revealed when the mental modifications are removed. The mind which is cultivated has to come to an end for the Spirit to shine forth. The mind which is petty and crooked has to cease for the revelation of the Spirit. Purity is required for the liberation of the human being. Pure heart is the most essential thing and only those who are pure in heart can see the God.

As it is already mentioned, human being is the highest being that exists in the world. It is only in this world that man can become free and dignified. Man is the highest conception of God. The attributes which we give to God belong to us. It is by transcending the body mind complex that we can become God. Becoming the God is the highest freedom which gives the human being the dignity. This dignity is of the Subject without the object. It is innate and autonomous and not borrowed but attained
through self-knowledge. It is absolute freedom and so beyond the
pairs of opposite. "That means that we are never free on the
earthly plane, but ever free on the spiritual side. The Self is
beyond both freedom and bondage. We are Brahman, we are
immortal knowledge beyond the senses, we are Bliss Absolute."33

The person who is ruled by the body and mind is not free.
The one who is controlled by the senses is a slave. He loses the
innate dignity of being absolutely free. Freedom is the mark of
higher being. Spiritual freedom begins when the individual loosens
himself or herself from the control of the senses. He whose senses
rule him is a slave. Vedanta says that people are bound since they
make themselves helpless. People are without autonomy because
they are dependent on others. They do not want dignity for they are
subservient to others. We are very lazy and lethargic and do not do
anything for ourselves. We want saviours or prophets to do
everything for us. Similarly, a rich person never walks but always
goes by the carriage. On one day, he wakes up paralysed all over.
Then, he realizes that he lived a dependent life. He now realizes
that nobody can walk for him. Vivekananda asks us to pull
ourselves out of the difficulties all by ourselves. "Save yourself by
yourself! There is none to help you—never was. To think that there
is, is sweet delusion. It comes no good."34

Each person has to work for his salvation, both spiritual and
social. One has to struggle hard and acquire what is wanted. One
has to put aside the mass of foolish beliefs for one's salvation. The person becomes more and more spiritual when he throws off the false ideas. He becomes more and more dignified when he dispenses with superstition and subservience. But we are interested in perpetuating superstitions and weaknesses. We do not fight to conquer nature. We do not strive to eradicate the false doctrines. Everyone must look upon oneself as the spirit which is beyond all misconceptions. Similarly one has to look upon others as the spirit only. Only then everybody can live in freedom and with dignity. In this context, Vivekananda holds that many religions have made man a slave. With their superstitions they have not helped man much. But man must go beyond the petty religions and embrace the true religion which is Vedanta. He says, "Men are still hypnotized into abject degradations. However, there are some strong souls who get over that illusion. The hour comes when great men shall arise and cast off these kindergartens of religion and shall make vivid and powerful the true religion, the worship of the spirit by spirit."35

Only the religion of Vedanta can prevent the human being from falling into the bondage of matter. It can alone help man to assert his freedom. It alone can give us the knowledge that prevents us from degradation in all respects. It can also give us the social morality of living with equality of all and dignity for all. It alone can generate pure love in the hearts of the people. The
pure love enables us to treat the other as oneself. It is in this love there is the unity of all without distinctions. Love is the essence of the Soul. It is the same in all human beings. It is the common substance of humanity. It is the unifying factor of all beings in the world. "In this sense all are one, and to hurt one's brother is to hurt one's Self."36 We are without freedom and dignity which are our essence. We are like the lions reared by the sheep. A lion fed by the sheep bleats like the sheep only. It says Ba-a-Ba instead of roaring. But when the cub saw its image reflected in water, realized that it is not sheep. When it saw another lion, the cub confirmed itself that it was not a sheep. Then it began to roar like another lion. Similarly, we have to come out of several kinds of misconceptions about of our being. We have to question the false images with which we are identified. We have to assert the freedom and dignity which is our true being. We have to liberate ourselves from the hypnotism of wrong ideas and awaken ourselves through the Vedantic philosophy. "We are lions in sheep's clothing of habit, we are hypnotized into weakness by our surroundings. And the province of Vedanta is the self-dehypnotisation. The goal to be reached is freedom."37

PERFECTION AND DIGNITY

Swami Vivekaṇanda says that the human person is of the nature of perfect freedom. Man is the embodiment of the Existence which is absolutely free. He or she is not bound by anything.
Neither nature nor anything else can take away freedom from him or her. Nothing can produce change in the human being, for he is the same as the infinite God. God is self-evident, omniscient and impersonal. He is the knower and master of nature, the Lord of all and the seat of all variety. He is the colouring in the wings of the butterfly and the blossoming and fragrance of the rose. He is the power within us and life comes out of this fire and the death is His shadow. But there is the evil and the terrible in life. We are being hunted by all that is sorrowful in life. But Vivekananda exhorts us to face the terrible, the sorrowful and the wicked. We have to face the troubles of life just as we face the wild animals which may chase us. We have to face nature and control it. Only then can we attain and maintain our freedom. "..... That is the lesson for all life—face the terrible, face it boldly. Like the monkeys, the hardships of life fall back when we cease to flee before them. If we are ever to gain freedom, it must be by conquering nature, never by running away. Cowards never win victories. We have to fight fear and troubles and ignorance if we expect them to flee before us."38

Vivekananda holds that it is freedom that gives the individual dignity. Dignity is the birth right of every person. Since freedom is the basis of dignity, lesser the freedom, lesser the dignity. Absence of freedom is the absence of dignity. Animals and insects have lesser degree of dignity for they have lesser degree of freedom. The slaves and savages were less dignified for they were
ignorant of complete freedom. The material world cannot command dignity as the humans can do, since it is beyond freedom. It is fully governed by the laws of nature. As it has already been said, human beings are not only free from the bondage of nature. They are capable of realizing the highest kind of freedom which is of the nature of bliss. That is, humans are more dignified than any other creature in the universe. In this regard, we are as free and as dignified as the Infinite God Himself. Vivekananda paradoxically says that human beings are the embodiment of both freedom and bondage. The Infinite God is both of good and evil. "I preach a God of virtue and a God of sin in one. Take Him if you dare- that is the one way to salvation; then alone will come to us the Truth Ultimate which comes from the idea of oneness."39

The idea that one is greater than the other will be lost only when all people— the good and bad, the high and low- are part of the one God. Anybody can attain freedom since nobody is different from Him. It depends on one's effort to attain freedom and dignity. The nearer one approaches Him, the more shall we be free and dignified. Then we will never differentiate between people. We will never say that someone is greater than the other in the Universe. Seeing nothing except the Lord puts an end to the evils of inequality and indignity of people. The evil of making distinctions among the people will disappear only when all people take refuse in the Spirit of the Lord. We cannot reach oneness without seeing God
in equality and dignity in everyone and everywhere. The universal unity, equality and dignity exist only when we all merge in the Spirit.\textsuperscript{40}

Vivekananda allegorically explains the way of merging oneself into the Infinite Being through an Upanishadic story. Two birds were sitting on a tree, one on the higher branch and the other on the lower one. The one sitting below was beautiful and eating the fruits of the tree. The fruits were both sweet and bitter. The bird felt happy when it happened to eat a sweet fruit and sorry when it ate a bitter one. After experiencing the cycle of sweet and bitter, happiness and sorrow, the bird looked up for another bird sitting on the top. Sitting atop the bird was calm and majestic and ate nothing neither sweet nor bitter. It was just immersed in its glory and serenity. The bird sitting lower again began to eat the sweet and bitter fruits until it happened to eat a very bitter one. Then again the poor bird looked at the bird which was silent and still sitting alone. It came nearer and nearer to the majestic bird and merged itself into it. Rays of light shone upon the sorrowful bird and enveloped it in such a way that it was transformed into the superior bird.

The story brings home the message that the lower bird is only the reflection of the higher one. So also we are actually one with the Lord. It is only the reflection of the Lord that makes us see many. The difference is not in the Lord but in His reflection in
us. When one sun is reflected in a million drew drops appear to be million tiny suns. Indeed the reflected suns cannot 'exist' without the original sun. So also we cannot exist without the Lord. We have to go beyond the reflection to see the oneness in all. We have to see through the veil of difference for the oneness to dawn. Only then there would be equal freedom and dignity of all in the world. Mistaking the reflection for the real is the source of bondage and indignity. Vivekananda says, "The reflection must vanish if we are to identify ourselves with our real nature which is divine. The universe itself can never be the limit of our satisfaction. That is why the miser gathers more and more money, that is why the robber robs, the sinner sins, that is why you are learning philosophy. All have one purpose. There is no other purpose in life, save to reach this freedom. Consciously or unconsciously, we are all striving for perfection. Every being must attain to."

Those who are on the wrong path to reach the freedom and attain perfection will take more time to reach and attain them. The person who is groping through the path of sin will reach the goal. The one who goes through misery and hell will also reach it. But it takes more time for them to accomplish the task. They require to take a different path. They will do it when they receive some hard blows on their heads. That is, they take to the path of virtue and purity when they face hardships in their life. They follow the path of spirituality and unselfishness only when they consciously realize
their wrong ways of life. They should abandon the evil paths they were following unconsciously. They should consciously and willingly turn to good paths to reach the Lord. Those who really want to reach freedom must follow what the great scriptures and philosophies are saying. The sacred books are meant to help us to attain to the freedom. They help us to come to the consciousness that we are one with everyone. They promote the sense of our identity with the Universe and the Lord. They help us to see ourselves in everything. There is no need to worship any creed or follow any sect. What is required is to see the Infinite God in everything in the Universe. This is possible only when one gets rid of the limited ideas about the Unlimited. One has to set aside every thought and action that limits the Lord. One has to go beyond all the limited notions of God. "If you are knowers of God, you will everywhere find the same worship as in your own heart."42

Swami maintains that true religion is knowing that the Infinite God is self-evident. To know that the God is in oneself and in every other person is religion. God is working through the hands of everybody, walking through the feet of everybody, and eating through the mouth of everybody. God is living and thinking through the minds of everybody. To know this self-evident truth gives us freedom. To attain freedom through the realization of God in oneself and in all is true religion. And this freedom which is spiritual gives us dignity. The dignity that this freedom gives is not
superficial but deep and abiding. It is a religious kind of dignity which is sacred and profound. To know that God is nearer to us than we are to ourselves gives us dignity based on divinity. God is pleased to give us freedom and dignity. He is pleased to make us immortal by showing us the oneness.

As it has already been mentioned it is oneness with God and with everything in the universe that elevates the individual from the world of the machines to the world of the divine. There is one God that breathes throughout the cosmos. We are the same as the One who is all pervading. We are the life of those who existed in the past. We are the soul of the Buddha, Jesus, and Mohammad. We are the universal and not this limited being. Religion is tearing the veil of differentiation. Evolution of the person to the life of freedom and dignity consists in overcoming the sense of difference. It lies in conquering the sense of superiority and inferiority. It consists in the realization of the creed of oneness, the highest of all creeds because it accords to the person the highest kind of freedom and dignity. All other creeds segregate people and subject them to bondage and many indignities. Vivekananda also says that it is not easy to attain freedom and dignity. The path to it is as sharp as the blade of a razor. It is long and difficult to reach it. The ancient sages also declared it to be a hard task to cross the path to freedom. But Vivekananda tells us not to be disheartened and encourages us to strive hard to attain freedom and dignity which
are our birthright. He inspires us with an Upanishadic declaration
"Arise! Awake! And stop not till the goal is reached."

Swami time and again says that we are responsible for our
condition. We do not have freedom and dignity because we do not
strive for it. We do not see the importance of being free and
dignified. Human being can become the master of himself or
herself. An individual can be an architect of his or her life. He or
she can even be the master of gods and conquer the demons. It is
wrong to think that there is poison in the cup. But there is indeed
nectar there in the cup. It is for us to look for it. We have to strive
to reach for the nectar by taking refuse in the Lord. One can give
up the difficult paths and struggles of knowledge and action. One
can reach the shore of freedom and dignity just by surrendering to
the lord. The scriptures of all religions subscribe to the path of
surrender by sacrificing everything to the Lord. One can gain the
infinite freedom by offering the good, the virtues, the sins, and the
sorrows to the Lord. That is, one can regain the higher Self of
dignity by conquering the lower self. The false self is the traitor of
freedom and dignity. We cannot achieve salvation by serving the
traitor. Those who serve the traitor and refuse to obey the voice of
the true Self will be condemned to slavery. We have to give up
ourselves to the Supreme will of the Lord. Only then will the chains
of slavery be cut for ever. We should be sure of attaining freedom
and dignity, for they are our inalienable characteristics. We are of
the nature of freedom and dignity. There is no need to repeat this truth. Repetition of truth is sin. The truth is that when once we give up the false self our task will be done. Our effort of attaining freedom and dignity will be done by conquering the false Self. We need not do anything more than that. Everything will be done just by dropping the traitor self. Swami says, "Well has it been said by the Hindu philosopher, if man says twice, 'Thy will be done', he commits sin. 'Thy will be done', what more is needed, why say it twice? What is good is good. No more shall we take it back. 'Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven, for Thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory for evermore."

MAN - THE MAKER OF HIS DESTINY

Swami Vivekananda is an uncompromising champion of human freedom and dignity. His conception of freedom and dignity is both spiritual and secular in character. It is spiritual in the sense that true freedom of the human being consists in the realization of the Vedantic Truth which is the Infinite and Omniscient Soul. It is secular in the sense that it is applicable to everyone irrespective one's religion, race or caste. It is secular also in the sense that it has profound implications for establishing a society wherein people live with freedom and dignity. The social problem of individual freedom and dignity is rooted in the spiritual truth of oneness of all beings. Real freedom and dignity are not something that one gives to the other. Each one has to achieve
them by oneself. They consist in the realization that one is already free. One is naturally free from the beginning.

Freedom is the birthright of all beings. Everyone deserves equal dignity without discrimination. The degradation of oneself is due to one's own ignorance and inactivity. It is because one does not assert one's freedom and dignity that one is a destitute. It is because one submits oneself to falsehood, fear and superstition that one is deprived of dignity. One has to be a master of oneself and stand up and proclaim that one is free. One has to go beyond the false laws that govern us and realize that we are not slaves of nature. One is beyond the even the stars, sun and moon. One is the vast soul which is adamantine and has to work for one's own freedom and dignity by realizing the soul which is the strongest. One should not lay on others the responsibility for one's freedom and dignity. One should feel the absolute responsibility for one's condition, whether servile or free. We are the makers of our destiny. We are responsible for our destiny since we are free through and through. Nothing can limit and nobody can curtail our freedom. It is we who limit our freedom and it is due to our sloth and laziness that we are unconscious of it. We have to arise and awake to the fact of our freedom and command the dignity we deserve. We have to give others the freedom and dignity they naturally deserve. Vivekananda says, "That is what Vedanta teaches. It does not propose any slipshod remedy by covering
wounds with gold leaf and the more the wound festers, putting one more gold leaf. This is a hard fact; work your way through it boldly, though it may be adamantine; no matter, the soul is stronger. It lays no responsibility on little gods; for you are the makers of your own fortunes. You make yourself suffer, you make good and evil and it is you who put your hands before your eyes and say it is dark. Take your hands away and see the light; you are effulgent, you are perfect already, from the very beginning.48

Vivekananda is of the view that self-realization is the only means of making man the master of himself. No amount of political or social changes can give human person true freedom and dignity. Outward changes cannot be a panacea for the human depravity. External manipulations of the human condition cannot cure the evils like the degradation of humanity. The inward change alone can restore man the dignity. The change of the soul for the better is required for the change in the human condition. No force is of any use in the transformation of the human being. No amount of legislation can work. No government can cure the cruelty of the human being to his or her own brothers and sisters. It is only the spiritual and ethical culture that can eradicate the evils in society. The spiritual and ethical change has to be brought about by oneself. And Vedanta is the only way to reform oneself and others spiritually and ethically.46
The Vedantic spirituality and ethics fosters universal toleration. It makes possible a civilization which can be built on the idea of tolerance. It alone can put an end to the culture of fanaticism, brutality and bloodshed. It makes the individual humane, humanitarian and charitable. It builds a society wherein each treats the other with empathy and is positively helpful and cooperative with others. It eradicates the differences that are a barrier to the dignity of the human being. It brings about such a change in the individual that it creates solidarity among people. Even the lowest of the low can uplift himself or herself through the realization of the Vedantic truth. The oneness of humanity is the only truth that can give man true dignity and pride. It is the only efficacious idea that works practically. The infinite Reality that exists in each one of us is the only basis for building our lives on sound lines. Vivekananda says, "I tell you, nevertheless that it is the one great life-giving idea which the world wants from us today, and which the mute masses of India want for their uplifting, for none can regenerate this land of ours without the practical application and effective operation of this ideal of oneness of things."47

Vivekananda contends that it is not only the Indian masses, even the Western masses can follow the ideas of Vedanta. The downtrodden masses of the West also have to adopt the principle of oneness. The West is unconsciously forming this principle as the
basis of their political and social changes. They have recognized the fact that the ideal of oneness and the divinity of the human person alone can create a true human being. A true human being is one who not only has the muscles of iron, nerves of steel and gigantic will but can penetrate into the mysteries of the universe and meet death face to face. To repeat, the true person is one who has faith in oneself and shapes his destiny. Otherwise, he will be like a slave without freedom and dignity and his fate will be in the hands of extraneous powers. The faith that divinity resides in every one should be the source of shaping one's life. One can lift oneself up and also others only when he or she is sure of the truth that the Soul is already pure. There is therefore the need to spread the Vedantic truth to the entire humanity. It should be taught to the masses so that they can uplift themselves. They need to know what they are. They should be awakened to the truth that they are already free. They should be aware of the fact that they deserve as much dignity as any other person. They should arise to the fact that they are not weak. They have to teach themselves of the truth that they are not without respect. They are not in any way different from the so called high and superior. Vivekananda says, "Let us proclaim to every soul: Arise, awake, and stop not till the goal is reached. None is really weak; the soul is infinite, omnipotent and omniscient. Stand, assert yourself, proclaim the God within you, do not deny Him! Too much of inactivity, too much of weakness,
too much of hypnotism has been and is upon our race. O ye modern Hindus, de-hypnotise yourselves, teach every one his real nature, call upon the sleeping soul and see how it awakes. Power will come, glory will come, goodness will come, purity will come, and everything that is excellent will come when this sleeping soul is roused to self-conscious activity."

The individual has to reform himself or herself on the wonderful idea of the sameness and omnipresence of the Supreme Soul. Thereby, the human race has to ameliorate itself from its degradation. It has to elevate itself to the level of absolute freedom and dignity cutting across all the barriers. Degradation of humanity is due to adherence to differences as real. Evil of discrimination and segregation is due to ignorance. Lack of the knowledge of truth is the source of suppression of humanity in oneself and in others. Instead of relying on difference, one should have clear knowledge of the sameness. One should also have firm faith in the equality of all and apply it to the details of daily living. One has to follow it practically in one's relationship with others.

Indeed, there is no reason at all to degrade oneself or others. It is foolish to differentiate oneself from others and exclude others from us. One should always bear in mind that all are bound by the same truth of oneness. Vivekananda says that social reform is of no use until the individual reforms oneself on the basis of the supreme truth of the sameness. Indeed reform movements have
hardly achieved anything. They have not been able to uplift the individual and society. No practical good has been achieved through social reform. It has not succeeded in the eradication of social evils like injustice, inequality, untouchability and so on. So one has to reform oneself on the lines of the Vedanta and improve the humankind by improving oneself. We have to progress to a fuller life by the practical realization of the oneness and the sameness. We have to follow the path laid down by our ancient sages. Vivekananda says, "I only ask you to work and realize more and more the Vedantic ideal of solidarity of man and his inborn divine nature."

DIVINE DIGNITY THROUGH RAJA YOGA
(Awake, Arise and Stop not...)

Vivekananda holds that Raja-Yoga is the supreme of all Yogas. It is the best means of attaining the moksha. It is superior to Bhakti Yoga, Karma Yoga and Jnana Yoga. And the human being alone is eligible to practice the Raja Yoga. Even Gods are not capable to practice it. They have to take the birth of the human person to practice Raja Yoga and achieve salvation. Raja Yoga is the king of all Yogas. Man can become the Supreme Being by practicing it. He can attain the union with the supreme consciousness by separating himself from Prakriti. Gods are those who are very much involved in Prakriti. Their life of indulgence is steeped in Prakriti. Raja Yoga is the only means of separating the Jiva from the Prakriti. And it would be easier for the Devas to
practice Raja Yoga by taking the birth of the human being. It is through the power of concentration that one can attain the Samādhi, the state of liberation. Raja Yoga alone is the means of attaining the concentration of the mind. Raja Yoga advocates eight steps to the realization of Samādhi through concentration. The eight steps are (1) Yama, (2) Niyama, (3) Āsana, (4) Prānayāma, (5) Pratyahāra (6) Dhārana, (7) Dhyāna and (8) Samādhi.81

Yama consists of five abstinences, namely, non-killing, truthfulness, non-stealing, continence and non-receiving of gifts. Niyama consists of five observances, namely, cleanliness, contentment, austerity, study, and self-surrender to God. Āsana means comfortable and firm posture. It is meant for gaining the power of sitting in one posture for a long time. So the practitioner has to select a posture in which he or she can meditate for a long time without difficulty. Generally, Padmāsana or Sukhāsana is advised to sit in meditation for long with ease. There are innumerable other āsanas one can practice for the control of the body. But it is enough if one masters any one posture. Here, the purpose of āsana is to sit with the spinal column erect without force. "But the main part of this activity will lie along the spinal column, so that the one thing necessary for the posture is to hold the spinal column free, sitting erect, holding the three points—the chest, the neck, and head—in a straight line."82
Next prānayāma is the breath control which is necessary for making the mind pure. Purification of the mind is necessary for fixing it on the object of concentration. Prānayāma involves breathing in the air with one nostril by closing the other nostril with the thumb. In the same way breathing out the air through the other nostril has to be practised. Practicing this process purifies the nerves and the mind. "Breath is like the fly wheel of the machine, the body. In a big engine you find the fly-wheel first moving, and that motion is conveyed to finer and finer machinery until the most delicate and finest mechanism in the machine is in motion. The breath is that fly-wheel, supplying and regulating the motive power to everything in this body."\textsuperscript{83}

Pratyahāra is the controlling of the mind to attach to or detach from the centres of concentration at will. It is voluntary ability to check the outgoing powers of the mind. It is freeing the mind from the thralldom of the senses. Pratyahāra literally means, according to Vivekananda, "gathering towards"\textsuperscript{84} the energy for proceeding towards freedom. By practicing Pratyahāra we really gain the character of being firm in our attempt at attaining Samādhi. It marks the clear advance towards liberation. "When we can do this, we shall really have taken a long step towards freedom; before that we are mere machines."\textsuperscript{85}

Practicing Pratyahāra leads to Dhārana which means holding the mind to certain points. It is focusing the mind on certain points
of the body in particular. It is, for instance, trying to feel only the hand to the exclusion of other parts of the body. Dhārana enables the person to take up one idea and pursue it till the end and make it our life. A person who is committed to an idea thinks of it, dreams of it and lives it. Dhārana is the main way to success by practicing the eightfold path. It enables us to plunge into the practice without thinking of the result. One who is perfect in Dhārana will be a perfect Yogi in six months, says Vivekananda. It gives perseverance and tremendous will power at which even the mountains will crumble.56

Dhārana will take the seeker to the penultimate step, namely, Dyāna which is an uninterrupted flow of concentration towards the "object" of concentration. Here, the concentration is like the flow of oil from one vessel into another. Dhyāna is meditation, an unbroken current towards the object of concentration. It is the power of meditating on the internal 'object' by excluding all the external objects. It involves meditation on the "One, the Almighty, the Intangible, whose name is Om, the Inexpressible, surrounded with effulgent light."57 It may be also thinking of a space in one's heart in the midst of which one has to think that a flame is burning. One has to meditate on that flame as one's own soul in which there is another effulgent light. That is the real Soul which is God.58
Meditating further on the Soul, the Almighty, results in the Samādhi. Twelve such Dhyānas will lead to Samādhi which marks the cessation of the mental modifications, namely, knowledge, indiscrimination, verbal delusion, sleep and memory. It is a state of equilibrium. Samādhi is of two kinds, namely, Samprajñāta and Asamprajñāta. In the former, the Yogi attains the powers of controlling nature. It is of four kinds—Savitarka which is the concentration on the external gross elements by questioning them, as it were. They may give their truth and powers to the seeker. But the seeker should go beyond this stage, since there is no liberation in getting powers. Then comes the second stage, namely Nirvitatarka which means meditation without question on the Tanmatras. The third stage is Savichāra which means meditation on the Tanmatras as being in time and space and with discrimination. And the fourth is Nirvichara Samādhi which is the meditation on the Tanmatras without discrimination.

Nirvichara Samādhi reaches the state of Sānanda Samādhi which is the blissful state. In this state the object of meditation is the interior organ, the thinking instrument. The thinking organ is thought of as bereft of the qualities of activity and dullness. That is, here the meditative mind is itself the object of meditation. When the meditation in the state of Sānanda Samādhi becomes more concentrated and ripe there comes another state called Sāsmita Samādhi. In this state all the ideas of gross and fine
materials are given up. Only the Sattva state of the Ego remains to be differentiated from all other objects. "The man who has attained to this has attained to what is called in the Vedas "bereft of body." That is, the seeker at this stage becomes the sage who can think of himself without his gross body. He thinks of himself as with a fine subtle body only.

Vivekananda says that in the state of Sâsmita Samâdhi some of the Sadhkas may get merged in nature. They get attracted to the powers which give them anything they want except liberation. These powers are a stumbling block to liberation. Those who get stuck with the powers without reaching the final step are called Prakritilayas. The so-called Gods are those who failed to reach the goal which is final freedom. They indulge in the material pleasures derived out of their powers. So, the person who attains freedom without merging in nature is superior to Gods. Even Gods are envious of the man who crosses the stage of Sâsmita Samâdhi. Gods resort to the tempting of the serious seeker to join their company. The seeker has to be very careful and escape the snares of the Gods at this stage of meditation. "A man may attain to all powers, and yet fall again. There is no safeguard until the soul goes beyond nature." The final stage of Samâdhi is the Asamprajñâta Samâdhi. This is attained by the constant practice of cessation of all mental activity. This is the perfect state of super consciousness which is
true freedom. Here meditation centres round on the mind itself. Whenever thoughts arise one has to strike them down. One should not allow any thought to come into the mind. Thus the seeker has to make his mind empty. When we can really do this, that very moment we shall attain liberation, says Vivekananda. Asamprajñāta Samādhi is also called a Samadhi without seeds. The seeds are the tendencies which manifest as the mental modifications. In this state, all the seeds of the waves of thought are completely destroyed. The destruction of the tendencies or impressions means the destruction of the mind itself. The destruction of the mind means the destruction of knowledge also. The seedless state of Samādhi is beyond knowledge. Knowledge is a lower state than the state of ultimate liberation. The state beyond knowledge is the highest state. "Knowledge itself is a manufactured something, a combination; it is not reality."62

Thus the human beings are the greatest of all beings in the universe. They alone can attain the greatest stage of liberation from sorrow. Of all the creatures, man alone can practice the path of Raja-Yoga to attain the highest state of mind, namely, Kaivalya. The lower beings cannot take to this path. Even Gods have taken the birth of the human being for the practice of Raja-Yoga. They cannot attain it without being a human being. The happiness that a Yogi attains in Samādhi is superior to the pleasures that Gods enjoy in heaven. The state of Samādhi is Truth, Consciousness
and Bliss \textit{(Satchidananda)}. When the man attains this state he is called the Supreme Being.\footnote{63} Man is capable of becoming the Supreme Being, because he is intrinsically the Supreme Being. Becoming the Supreme Being is his or her birthright. No other being has the right to become the Supreme Being. Thus the greatness of man lies in becoming the master of nature through the science of \textit{Yoga}. Man can conquer his mind and can become the master of himself. Conquering the mind and its modifications is much more difficult than conquering nature. Vivekananda inspires human beings to conquer the outer and inner worlds to attain freedom. He says, "It is much easier to do anything upon the external plane, but the greatest conqueror in the world finds himself a mere child when he tries to control his own mind. This is the world he has to conquer- the greater and more difficult world to conquer. Do not despair. Awake, arise, and stop not until the goal is reached."\footnote{64}
References


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7. Ibid., p. 389.

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10. Ibid., p. 391.

11. Ibid., p. 391.


13. Ibid., p. 276.


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16. Ibid., p. 284.

17. Ibid., p. 286.

18. Ibid., p. 287.

19. Ibid., pp. 287-288


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22. Ibid., p. 334.
23. Ibid., p. 334.
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26. Ibid., p. 335.
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43. Ibid., p. 342.
44. Ibid., p. 343.

46. Ibid., pp. 183-84.


48. Ibid., p. 190.

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50. Ibid., p. 196.


52. Ibid., pp. 137-38.

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60. Ibid., p. 212.

61. Ibid., p. 212.

62. Ibid., p. 213.


64. Ibid., pp. 520-21.