CHAPTER V

VIVEKANANDA'S CONCEPTION OF THE
DIGNITY OF THE HUMAN PERSON - A
SOCIAL PERSPECTIVE
In this chapter, we are going to discuss the implications of the metaphysical conception of freedom and dignity for the individual and social well-being. We are going to deal with the issues of practical Vedanta, the problem of privilege, universal brotherhood, education, women, human rights and spiritual humanism in relation to the dignity of the person as enunciated by Vivekananda.

**PRACTICAL VEDANTA AND THE HUMAN DIGNITY**

According to Swami Vivekananda the Vedanta philosophy is intensely practical. Vedanta is of immense value since it is possible to put its truth into practice. It is not an intellectual gymnastics and impracticable theory. It is a religion which we can carry out in our daily life. To Vedanta, the difference between religion and life
is fictitious, for it teaches the oneness of life throughout. Its ideals cover the whole of our life and penetrate into our thoughts and actions. They proceed from the forest caves of contemplation to the streets and cities of daily living. Vedanta philosophy has several practical dimensions and implications. One of them is to instill faith in oneself. It says that a theist is one who believes in the glory of one's own soul. The true believer is one who believes in his or her own freedom and dignity. An atheist is not the one who does not believe in a personal God but the one who does not believe in his or her own freedom and dignity. A theist says that all human beings are eternally free and deserve all dignity. The differences of caste, race and sex are false. The indignities, the pains and sorrows arising out of the apparent differences are baseless. They are a barrier to the realization of the ideal that we are already free, autonomous and deserve dignity. "There is neither man nor woman nor child, nor difference of race or sex, nor anything that stands as a bar to the realization of the ideal, because Vedanta shows that it is realized already, it is already there."¹

Vedanta is practical in the sense that it insists on the truth that freedom and dignity are our real nature. Freedom is not an ideal but the practical principle which gives equal status to everybody. It bestows dignity on all people in the world. Nobody needs to think that he or she is a little mortal being. It is wrong to say that I am inferior and does not deserve equality. It is also
wrong to think that others are lesser mortals. It is a mistake to marginalize and suppress others. To say that one is inferior to others is self-deception. It is not good to hypnotise oneself into thinking that one is weak and wretched. Vedanta proclaims that the greatest error is to think that one is a miserable creature. No one should think that one is powerless and bind oneself by thinking that one is not free and equal. One should not strengthen the chains of bondage by thinking that one is useless.

In fact, a majority of people bind themselves by thinking that they are imperfect and inferior by birth. They believe that they are impure and do not deserve dignity. Such people are indeed sowing bad thoughts in the minds of people. They are laying a foundation for a false and hypnotized life. Indeed the practical Vedanta teaches that everybody is free, dignified and an embodiment of native purity. All creatures are the same and immortal. The difference, if any, is only in degree, not in kind. From the standpoint of the highest truths of Vedanta the differences among people will vanish. One may see great difference between people, but the one who has realized the Vedantic truths will see no such difference. To him, the lowest and the highest are one and the same. Vivekananda says that even God cannot create differences among people. He says, "I would rather die a hundred times than worship such a God. My whole life would be a fight with such a
God. But there is no difference, and those who say there is, are irresponsible, heartless people who do not know.**

Vivekananda upholds the brotherhood of humanity. He exhorts us to put the ideal of universal brotherhood into practice. The practical Vedanta means the actualization of the ideal of brotherhood. Progress of a society depends on our commitment to the ideal. We should discriminate the man of flesh from the man of truth. Then only we stop degrading certain people to slavery. Seeing man as God means to raise everybody to the divinity and dignity of God. It is ignorance to look down upon others with contempt. All people are going towards the same goal. It is inhuman to suppress some people as being inferior. It is wrong to deny them the opportunity of reaching the goal. It is also wrong to prevent them from enjoying the social status they deserve.

As it has already been mentioned the difference between the strong and the weak is one of degree. Same is the case with virtue and vice, class and caste, life and death. All the differences in the life-world are of degree only, since oneness is the secret underlying all. All is One and it manifests in thought, life and society. So we have no right to condemn those who are not developed as we are. We have a duty to stretch out a helping hand to those who are deprived of dignity. If we cannot help, at least bless them and let them be free to live their own lives. One should not spend one's lives in criticizing and dragging down others. Instead, one has to
work for the freedom and dignity of those who have been condemned to be the downtrodden. Swami says, "Criticism and condemnation is a vain way of spending our energies, for in the long run we come to learn that all are seeking the same thing, are more or less approaching the same ideal, and that most of our differences are merely differences of expression."³

Practical Vedanta means giving strength to the weak. It is not condemning the weak as being good for nothing. It is to awaken them to the strength that is already there within them. A Vedantin tells the so-called impure and the weak people that they are indeed pure and strong. The weakness does not belong to them. They are capable of manifesting the Self in its high degree. One should not discourage the weak and the powerless but tell them that the limitations imposed upon them are insignificant. They are nothing when compared with our true nature, namely, freedom and dignity. We should assure the downtrodden by saying, "You can do anything and everything, you are almighty,"⁴ avers Vivekananda.

Vedanta is the religion which is practical also because it helps those who are in servitude. It works for those who are in the degraded condition. Firstly, it performs the greatest function of instilling faith in oneself. It believes in the principle that creating faith in oneself is the greatest help. A large portion of evils and miseries of people can be eradicated by creating faith in oneself.
Faith in oneself proves to be the motive power for achieving the
great things in life. Even a person who has gone down to the
lowest level can become great if he or she has faith in himself or
herself. Faith in oneself will do everything good to us. It makes us
grow stronger and stronger. Faith in oneself is not self-centred. It
means faith in everybody's strength, equality, freedom and dignity.
It also means love for everybody, the lowest of the low. So faith in
humanity as a whole makes the world a better place to live. Faith
teaches us that an individual is full of possibilities. Even the
downtrodden is capable of infinite power and possibilities. Swami
says, "Therefore, you must not say that you are weak. How do you
know what possibilities lie behind that degradation on the surface?
You know but little of that which is within you. For behind you are
the ocean of infinite power and blessedness."8

Vivekananda advises those who are in servitude to think
always that they are the Atman. They have to repeat this truth day
in and day out. The truth that one is the blemishless Soul has to
enter into one's veins. It should tingle in every drop of one's blood,
flesh and bone. One should meditate on it till it becomes part and
parcel of one's life. One should also think intensely that others are
also the birthless, deathless, the omnipotent and glorious Soul.
Thinking and meditating constantly on this eternal truth enables
us to live in the same manner. We do not differentiate between
people any more. Those who want to be practical in life should
never think that he or she is weak. Never undermine and degrade others by saying that they are weak. One may not do good to others. But it is imperative that one should not injure others by degrading them. We should always bear in mind the truth of the oneness of all. There is one life and one world and we are all equal partners in the life-world.

Swami wishes that we should never think that we are impure, miserable, and sinners deprived of dignity. Thinking that one is not impure but pure will have the practical result of changing oneself. It brings about love in oneself. Love is truth, since it brings about oneness. Love binds people. In love you become one with the other. Love is Existence itself and the whole universe is the manifestation of love. Love is one and all pervading. All our actions should make for oneness. Our thoughts also should contribute to integration and never aim at division and disintegration. They should never generate hatred and degradation of others. Only love can form the basis of freedom and dignity of the person. Love is the most practical principle and the best ethical principle that we can derive from the Vedanta. Love can establish a society of equality, liberty and fraternity.

Vivekananda argues that the ideas of the ethics of Vedanta have to be worked out in detail. Mere intellectual understanding of Vedanta is not enough. The Vedantic ideals have to touch our hearts beyond the intellect. The society can be transformed only
when our feelings and emotions are pure. Mere intellectual knowledge is not enough. The truth of oneness should manifest in our actions and conduct. We have to feel oneness in everybody for treating the other with dignity. It is not thought but the feeling that is life. Feeling is the strength and the vitality. Without feeling, no amount of intellectual activity can change society. Real help to others lies in the feeling of love. Feeling for others is the only source of treating the other with dignity. Empathy is the most powerful feeling that can change our attitude to others. One should empathize with others like the Christ or the Buddha. One should be a prophet like them. We should have the same soul as they had. All of us have to become prophets which we already are. "Intellect is like limbs without the power of locomotion. It is only when feeling enters and gives them motion that they move and work on others. That is so all over the world, and it is a thing which you must always remember. It is one of the most practical things in Vedantic morality, for it is the teaching of the Vedanta that you are all prophets, and all must be prophets. The book is not the proof of your conduct, but you are the proof of the book. How do you know that a book teaches truth? Because you are truth and feel it. This is what the Vedanta says."
PRIVILEGE—THE BANE OF HUMAN DIGNITY

Vivekananda says that the dignity of the person is possible through Vedanta only. The Vedantic idea that everything and everybody is that Absolute, namely, Brahman alone can bring about the equality of all. We all are the same in the sense that there is no real difference between us and the Absolute. "You are the whole of that Absolute, and so are all others, because the idea of part cannot come into it,"7 says Vivekananda. The divisions among people are not real but apparent only. They are not in us at all since we are the same as the one reality which is without divisions. Each one of us is a complete and perfectly free being. All are endowed with dignity, since we are never bound. Bondage lies in our thinking. If we think that we are bound we remain to be bound. If we think that we are free we remain to be free. Vedanta aims to let us know that we are forever free. We never change but remain to be ever the same. We do not also die since we were never born. The changes that we see are not real. The phenomenal world of differences is an apparent world. It is bound by space, time and causation. It is due to the evolution of nature as the manifestation of the Absolute. In Vedanta, the appearance of the Absolute in the form of the world of differences is called the Vivearthva-Vada.8 The changeless Absolute is there in every being from the amoeba to the perfect man. The insignificant amoeba also contains the infinite perfection. But the perfection is covered with
a thick screen in the amoeba. The screen has to be torn off by making a hole in it. The perfection can be fully attained by removing the veil of Maya. Here the screen of Maya is made of time, space and causation. The Infinite is beyond the Maya and we come face to face with the whole perfection when the Maya is dispelled. Only the human being is capable of overcoming the Maya. We are able to dispel Maya through knowledge. "There is little hole somewhere, through which I can catch only a glimpse of the soul. When the hole is bigger, I see more and more, and when the screen has vanished, I know that I am the soul."

The Absolute exists without changes which are in Nature. The Absolute not only exists in me but in everyone also and it manifests in everyone but more in some and less in some others. But the fact is that there is the Absolute in everyone and it manifests in everyone in some degree or the other. There is nobody without the Absolute and so the entire universe is really one and the same. The Self is the underlying principle of the world of differences. It is free of all the limiting adjuncts and one has to work hard to realize that Self. Indeed, all our struggles and exercises tend towards the goal of reaching the Self. Even our tears and smiles, pains and pleasures aim at tearing the screen covering the spirit. One should strive relentlessly to get rid of the bondages and dispel the clouds surrounding our true nature of freedom and dignity. The whole universe is a movement towards
the infinite Spirit. Every being is unconsciously moving towards it. But one has to consciously strive to get free from the bondages. One should make a determined effort to realize the Spirit. One should not wait for the time to come. But one should hasten the time of realizing freedom. One should augment the process of realization by bringing the future to the present. Swami says, "Consciously or unconsciously, therefore, the whole universe is going towards that goal. The moon is struggling to get out of the sphere of attraction of other bodies, and will come out of it, in the long run. But those who consciously strive to get free hasten the time."\(^{10}\)

Vivekananda argues that the idea that every being in the universe is moving towards the goal of the infinite freedom brings about a real universal love. This theory can form the basis for the love among all beings in the universe. The fellow beings, the plants, the animals are in the process of evolution. Even the wicked, the evil person is also in the same path. They are also in the same stream. They are marching towards the same goal of infinite freedom. Creation means moving towards freedom. It means struggle to regain our original freedom. Nothing can reverse this process of getting back to freedom. None can stop the course of driving towards the ultimate value. There is love in the universe. It is manifesting in the form of attracting us towards it. Freedom is the centre of our being. Love is attracting us to the centre of
freedom from which we were thrown away. The universe itself is the embodiment of love. It comes out of love, remains in love goes back to love. "From love it comes, in love it remains, back it goes unto love,"¹¹ says Vivekananda.

Besides generating universal love, the idea that all beings are striving to reach the Infinite freedom, gives rise to the principle of equality. The moral consequence of this theory is that all are equal, since everyone is the embodiment of Knowledge, Existence and Bliss. It says that all knowledge is within and not without. Knowledge is in the spirit, the principle of freedom. It is not there in Nature. Nature is only a reflecting glass on which knowledge reflects. Knowledge is the source of freedom. It comes from the human soul and not from the outer world. Even the powers and the secret laws of nature are in the human soul. We discover them which are inherent in us. Everything is preexistent and pre-established in us from time immemorial. The idea that everyone is potentially the Spirit can create equality among all people. It can eradicate the idea of privilege which is the bane of equality and dignity.

Vivekananda maintains that the practice of privilege is brutal for it is the source of inequality and oppression. He holds that caste is responsible for privilege. Caste makes for the privilege of the few and suffering of the many. It is necessary to brake down privilege by eradicating caste system. A race can progress only
when it is free from the scourge of privilege. There are several kinds of privileges, namely, the privilege of wealth, the privilege of intellect, and the privilege of spirituality. The privilege of all these creates difference between people. Those who have more wealth treat those who are poor as inferiors. Those who are more knowledgeable treat the ignorant as their inferiors. And those who know more of spirituality treat others as useless people. They regard themselves as the messengers of God and reduce others to the level of the common herd. Vivekananda says that of all the privileges, the privilege of spirituality is the most tyrannical. Those who practice it say that others have to worship them.\textsuperscript{12}

Swami Vivekananda maintains that the philosophy of Vedanta is the best solution for the problem of privilege. Vedanta is opposed to all kinds of privilege. It teaches that nobody in the world is in a privileged position. It does not admit of privilege for anyone. There is no basis for any kind of privilege either physical, mental or spiritual. All people have the same power in them. There is the same potentiality in everyone. The only difference is that the potential power manifests more in some and less in other people. The soul of everybody is infused with knowledge, including the soul of an ignorant person. The ignorant has to manifest the innate knowledge and find an opportunity to manifest it. One has to find the suitable environment for the inherent knowledge to manifest. It is lack of proper occasion for manifestation that makes the
ignorant remain as ignorant. It is also due to lack of effort on their part to manifest it that keeps them ignorant. So the idea of one being superior to the other is wrong. No race or no nation is superior to the other. It is the circumstances that make for the difference. Given the suitable circumstances and opportunity, every one, every race or every nation can manifest the same kind of knowledge. "The idea that one man is born superior to another has no meaning in the Vedanta; that between two nations, one is superior and the other is inferior has no meaning whatsoever. Put them in the same circumstances, and see whether the same intelligence comes out or not. Before that you have no right to say that one nation is superior to another."  

Vivekananda regards Vedanta as being practical also because it is highly relevant to the eradication of privilege in society. The problem of claiming of privileges is intensified in the modern world. It has become severe with the growth of knowledge. Excess of knowledge leads to reduction of holiness. Knowledge devoid of holiness is detrimental to the dignity of the human being. It makes human beings devils, for it gives power. Power devoid of love is brutal. Knowledge is contributing to the manufacturing of machines. Technology is leading to inventions of several appliances. The machines and the appliances are making the human being more powerful. The power is creating a sense of privilege in the individual. The privilege is creating division and
conflict in the life world. It is bringing about tyranny and unrest in society. Practical Vedanta preaches against the privilege of superiority. It aims at breaking down the attitude of destroying the dignity of the human being. It says that one has to look upon everyone as being equal. The learned Brahmin is the same as the low caste or the animal. The sage is one who treats even the outcaste as he or she treats himself or herself. The wise person is the one who sees no difference among the human beings. Wisdom lies in concentrating on the sameness and conquering the relative existence. The mind of the sage is fixed in the Lord who is the one and the same to all. Those who see the sameness in all are pure and perfect. They are said to be living in the limitless Lord.

Vivekananda says that the sense of privilege is unreal. It is subjective in character. That is, it lies in our mind and not in the world. The world of slavery and inequality is due to our prejudices. The indignities and sufferings of humanity are due to our misconception. The change in the world warrants a change in our mind. A world with equality, freedom and dignity for all is possible only when there is a change in us. The world will change only when we see the sameness in all taught by the Vedantic morality. One has to change oneself first without asking for others to change. We have to be the change that we expect in others. The subjective world conditions the objective world. The mind or the Soul rules over the outer world. The condition of the society is
based on the nature of the mind. The good mind creates a good society. The evil one creates a society with several crises.

Vivekananda says,

"Change the subject, and the object is bound to change; purify yourself, and the world is bound to be purified. This one thing requires to be taught now more than ever before. We are becoming more and more busy about our neighbours, and less and less about ourselves. The world will change if we change; if we are pure, the world will become pure. The question is why I should see evil in others. I cannot see evil unless I be evil. I cannot be miserable unless I am weak. Things that used to make me miserable when I was a child do not do so now. The subject changed, so the object was bound to change; so says the Vedanta."14

The Vedantic mind of equality and sameness destroys the causes of inequality and difference. The mind forms the basis for freedom and dignity. But the mind that is conditioned by the sense of inequality and difference has to be conquered through the practical Vedanta. It is not easy to conquer the unstable and fluctuating mind. The mind has to be protected from the external forces. We have to prevent the mind from being overpowered by the outer provocations. It has to make itself concentrated, stable and gain the power of acting upon the external world. It should be in a meditative state inspite of all the forces outside. Vivekananda is of the view that the salvation of humanity lies in the concentrated and meditative mind. The stable condition of the mind is the fountainhead of great ideas. It is from this mind that the beautiful streams of thought have flowed upon the world. it is
this mind that has produced the great sages in every nation. It has
created the illustrious beings who have changed the lives of the
poor and the miserable.

Vivekananda says that the Vedanta should not remain to be a mere theory. Those who have realized the concentrated mind of
freedom and equality must practice oneness in their life. They
should treat others as being endowed with freedom and dignity. It
is not enough merely to believe in the equality of all life and the
sameness of everything. One has to put into practice what he
believes. The priests in India preach that the same soul is there
everyone. But when a low caste person approaches them, they
shun him. They avoid the downtrodden like the plague. Same is
the case in the West. The wealthy and the elite in England preach
the Christian doctrine of brotherhood but illtreat the common
people. We only preach and say that it will take a long time to put
it into practice. "Thus it has been a theory only for several
thousands years and never came into practice. All understand it,
declare it as the truth, but when you ask them to practice it, they
say, it will take millions of years."18

Vivekananda contends that of all the privileges, the privilege
of spirituality is the worst. It is responsible for the priestly class
who regard themselves as the messagers of God. The priests think
that they are superior to others and claim privileges over others.
They do not face the truth that all are equal and potentially divine.
The divinity will manifest even in the ignorant when the appropriate circumstances arise. The priests do not practice the equality that their religion advocates. It is the same with the Christian priest craft also. They do not care for the practical equality that is there in their scriptures. Practical equality is there in the Vedanta as well as in the Christianity. But the Hindu and Christian priests do not dare to face this truth as it is. They try to suppress this ideal by saying that it meant for a few only. They say that it is difficult to practice it but do not confess that they are not really striving to put it in practice. Vivekananda holds that we have to destroy our sense of privilege. We have to trample on everything that is working for the sense of privilege in us. We have to work for the knowledge which will bring the feeling of sameness for the entire humankind. The pride of spirituality practised by the priests has to be eliminated, for it brings sorrow to us. It forges a glittering chain around our feet. Thinking that one is purer and near the God than others does not give freedom. It only enhances pride which is a barrier to freedom. Indeed, all are one in the sense that there is divinity in all. Everybody deserves the same kind of dignity.

"And, above all, if the pride of spirituality enters into you, woe unto you. It is the most awful bondage that ever existed. Neither can wealth nor any other bondage of the human heart bind the soul so much as this. 'I am purer than others' is the most awful idea that can enter into the human heart. In what sense are you pure? The God in you is the God in all. If you have not known this, you have known nothing. How
can there be difference? It is all one. Every being is
the temple of the Most High; if you can see that, good,
if not, spirituality has yet to come to you.16

Thus, Vivekananda maintains that the Vedantic spirituality
and ethics of sameness and equality can break down all kinds of
privileges. It can also turn the pride of privilege into a privilege of
service to the humankind. It is wrong to claim privilege of
superiority on the basis of the knowledge of spirituality. It is also
wrong to ask for the privilege of superiority on the basis of being
born in a higher and learned caste. But the truth is that all
beings, great or small, are the manifestations of God. This message
of the Vedanta should be imprinted in the heart of all beings.
Everyone is a being of perfect freedom and deserves equal dignity.
The work of Advaita is to breakdown the problem of privileges. It is
the hard work which only the practical Vedanta can accomplish.
Vedantic ethics has to be taught to people all over the world for the
establishment of a society of liberty, equality and fraternity. It
alone can give the human beings the dignity they deserve.

UNIVERSAL BROTHERHOOD AND HUMAN DIGNITY

As a social reformer rooted in the Vedanta, Vivekananda
strives to endow the human being with the right kind of dignity
that makes the person attain the highest state in the universe. The
dignity that he strived for is fundamental in the sense that it
warrants the realization of one's true nature. It is so radical a kind
of dignity that it gives man the place of God. The dignity consists
in the realization that one is God himself or herself. The Upanishadic text 'I am That' forms the basis of this dignity. It is founded on the self-knowledge that one is not the body and mind but the Self which is beyond them. Vedanta says that the individual is omnipresent, omniscient and omnipotent since the individual is the Soul which is One without the second. The Self knows no division or conflict. Everything is in it and it is in everything.

The Spirit stands for the eternal freedom, permanent purity and perfection of the individual. And it is this purity and perfection which can form the basis of ethics. The Vedantic ethics alone can make the individual truly good. Only the person who is spiritually moral can be absolutely good. Such a person alone can protect the dignity and freedom of others. He cannot differentiate between himself and others but sees the universality. Vivekananda says,

"The two phases of this distinction in life are- first, that the man who knows the real Self, will not be affected by anything; secondly, that man alone can do good to the world. That man alone will have seen the real motive of doing good to others, because there is only one, it cannot be called egoistic, because that would be differentiation. It is the only selflessness. It is the perception of the universal, not the individual. Every case of love and sympathy is an assertion of this universal. 'Not I, but thou'. Help another because you are in him and he is in you, is the philosophical way of putting it. The real Vedantist alone will give up his life for a fellow man without compunction because he knows he will not die."17

The Vedantic truth of oneness espoused by Vivekananda has profound implications for universal brotherhood. Being impersonal,
the truth creates the supreme state of love in the individual. The brotherhood means love of all human beings as oneself. It brings about the universal religion of tolerance and puts an end to tyranny and oppression in the world. It protects the dignity of humanity both by precept and in practice. The priceless religion of brotherhood creates in the people of the world a genuine interest in the dutiful respect for the dignity of humanity. The protection of human dignity is out of the question without the love based on the impersonal truth. Protection of human dignity by the rule of law is fraught with problems. It is always associated with the violation of the law and the infringement of human dignity and freedom. But the protection of human freedom and dignity by the realization of the truth of oneness is devoid of the problems of infringement. The person who has realized the truth, love and brotherhood will be sensitive to freedom and dignity of all. He or she is always and readily willing to sacrifice himself or herself for the welfare of humanity. He or she lives with the deep conviction to work for the full development of the personality of all. He or she will never engage himself or herself in any activity aimed at the infringement of the dignity of anyone, including the flora and fauna. Vivekananda says, "So those who are really workers, and really feel at heart the universal brotherhood of man, do not talk much, do not make little sects for universal brotherhood; but their acts, their movements, their whole life, show out clearly that they in truth
possess the feeling of brotherhood for mankind, that they have love and sympathy for all. They do not speak, they do and they live.\textsuperscript{18}

Vivekananda says that the person who lives the life of universal love and brotherhood does not require the rule of the law, for he is bound by the law of the universe. He need not be regulated by any institutional law since he is bound by the law of the supreme love. Being beyond even the law of causation governing nature, he lives loving others without any motive or an end in view. His love for others is absolutely free and unconditional. All his actions are disinterested and contribute immensely to the welfare of humanity. Being fully conscious of his true nature, namely, the infinite Spirit he becomes one with others and works for the common good without the need of being regulated by any law.

The institutional law is the handiwork of those who have not realized the supreme love. It is the invention of those who have not experienced the universal brotherhood of humanity. The laws are formulated by those who have not liberated themselves from prejudice and pride. So the law of any government or nation is not without flaws. But the one who is liberated by realizing the infinite truth transcends such laws. He lives in accordance with the cosmic law that can never be transgressed. Vivekananda says,

\begin{quote}
Governments, societies etc. are comparative evils. All societies are based on bad generalization. The moment you form yourselves into an organization, you begin to hate everybody outside of that organization.
\end{quote}
When you join an organization, you are putting bounds upon yourself, you are limiting your own freedom. The greatest goodness is the highest freedom. Our aim should be to allow the individual to move towards this freedom. More of goodness, less of artificial laws; such laws are not laws at all. If it were a law it could not be broken. The fact that those so called laws are broken shows clearly that they are not laws. A law is that which cannot be broken.\textsuperscript{19}

**EDUCATION FOR THE DIGNITY OF MAN**

Swami Vivekananda is an advocate of the transformation of the human being and society through education. The individual can become free from spiritual and social bondage through proper education. The society can be free from the evil of the degradation and discrimination of people through education. A truly educated is one who is autonomous and free and has uplifted himself from all kinds of suppression. He is the one who has liberated himself from self suppression and the suppression by the society. Vivekananda proposes a unique system of education founded on the belief that the self of the human being, \textit{Atman} is common to every body. Spiritual education based on the purity and perfection of the Self can change the individual. It can also change his or her tendency towards others and the world. Vivekananda calls this as the man making education. Man making education is that which questions anything that makes the individual weak. It rejects as poison the ideals that degrade the person intellectually, morally or spiritually. Man making education is centered around the truth that human being is pure. Truth is all-knowledge which
strengthens the individual. Truth is enlightening and invigorating. Man making education is the same as the Upanishadic philosophy comprising the greatest truths. "The truths of the Upanishads are before you. Take them up, live up to them and the salvation of India will be at hand."²⁰

Vivekananda maintains that education should enable the student to think that he or she is the Spirit. Realization of the Spirit enables the individual to a better person. Realized people become better performers in their occupation also. Whatever may be the profession of the person, he does it in a better way. Even the least thing can be done in a refiner manner. If the carpenter thinks that he is the Spirit, he will be a better carpenter. If the student thinks that he is the Spirit he will be a better student. Same will be the case with a teacher, a father or a mother. Education eradicates the sense of privilege from the person. A man of character does not think he is superior to the other because of his birth in a particular caste. He does not think that he is superior because he performs a particular profession. The person who governs a country is not superior to the one who mends the shoes. One may be good in a particular profession and the other in a different one. There is no reason for a ruler to trample on the head of the ruled. Education should inculcate in the student the spirit of equality in place of privilege. The man making education based on the Vedanta endows all people with equal dignity. "If you teach
Vedanta to the fisherman, he will say, I am as good a man as you; I am a fisherman, you are a philosopher, but I have the same God in me as you have in you. And that is what we want, no privilege for any one, equal chances for all; let every one be taught that the divine is within, every one will work out his own salvation."

Education liberates man and enables him to grow on his own. It gives us the strength to work out our salvation independently. It gives us power to make our own destiny and teaches that we are the architects of our lives. We deserve the freedom we strive for. We deserve the dignity we command. Nobody should rule the other. Nobody should allow the other to rule us. Nobody should submit oneself to be ruled by the other. Every soul is the soul of God. One has to work out one's own Karma. There is a load of Karma in each one to work out. A truly educated one works out his own salvation. At the same time, he looks upon everyone as the incarnation of the Infinite Spirit and serves everyone as he serves the God. He serves others with utmost humility and regards service to others as worship to God. He finds his salvation through service to others. He regards the poor and the miserable as being there for his salvation through service. To him, the deceased and the destitute are the representatives of the Lord. Even the sinner or the leper is an embodiment of the Lord. A man of character thinks that he is allowed by the Lord to serve him in all these forms. He regards serving the lowest of the low as his
privilege and regards treating them with dignity as his duty. He voluntarily gives up the idea of ruling over others and does good to the needy.

The educated people do good to others just as much as we do in the case of rearing a plant. We give the seed the materials required for it to sprout. We supply the earth, the water, the air required for its growth. The seed and the plant takes all that is necessary and grows on its own and by its own nature. Similarly education should teach the student the art of treating others with care and concern. It should enable us to help others to grow with freedom and dignity. It should enable us to give the weak and the poor all that is required for their natural and spontaneous growth. Vivekananda urges the educated thus: "Bring all light into the world. Light, bring light! Let light come unto every one; the task will not be finished till every one has reached the Lord. Bring light to the poor; and bring more light to the rich, for they require it more than the poor. Bring light to the ignorant, and more light to the educated, for the vanities of the education of our time are tremendous! Thus bring light to all and leave the rest unto the Lord, for in the words of the same Lord, 'To work you have the right and not to the fruits thereof'. Let not your work produce results for you, at the same time may you never be without work. May He who taught such grand ideas to our forefathers ages ago help us to get strength to carry into practice. He commands."22
Vivekananda reiterates that secular education is necessary. Secular education is the education which teaches science and technology. It is required for earning one's livelihood. But too much of mechanical education makes man an automation. It makes the person dehumanized and materialistic. Therefore secular education has to be supplemented with the spiritual education. Man making education is of primary importance. Devoid of the man making education, secular education serves the negative purpose. It weighs down all the good qualities in the person. It negates the divinity that is intrinsic to the human being. It proclaims that spiritual education is useless and impractical, the sacred texts are full of lies and the spiritual teachers are hypocrites. Thus it makes the student a mass of negation. It makes the person lifeless and spiritless. Secular education merely fills the mind with information and does not awaken the ideas that contribute to his character. It dampens the original nature of the mind and kills the power of concentration. It gives importance to learning by rote and makes the mind a storehouse of data. It reduces the person to a kind of library which does not know the value of knowledge. Education as the capacity for memory is a barrier to education as the power of concentration and creativity.

"Education is not the amount of information that is put into your brain and runs riot there, undigested, all your life. We must have life building, man making, character making assimilation of ideas. If you have assimilated five ideas and made them your life and character, you have more education than any
man who has got by heart a whole library. The ass carrying its load of sandalwood knows only the weight and not the value of sandalwood. If education is identical with information, the libraries are the greatest sages in the world, and the encyclopaedias are the Rishis."

Dealing further with education, Vivekananda says that education is the best means of making people free from slavery and degradation. Education should be such that it enables the individual to regain the lost freedom and dignity. It should serve the purpose of uplifting the poor from their pitiable condition. Education should give the uneducated the ideas which will awaken them to the fact that they too are human beings. It should liberate them from their attitude of being subjugated. They should not allow themselves to be trodden down by others. In fact, the poor of India have long back forgotten that they are also human beings like others. Education should open their eyes to what is going on in the world. It should empower them to workout their own salvation. They should be given both kinds of education, namely, the scientific and the spiritual. Scientific education is for making them economically strong. Spiritual education is for making them psychologically strong.

Swami maintains that education should embody science combined with Vedanta. The science education coupled with Vedanta restores to the poor their lost personality. It gives them around freedom and dignity and enables them to think and speak freely. It gives them food, shelter, and cloth. The Indian poor are
deprived of humanity for ages. The so-called elite and the educated have been treating them worse than beasts. They have deprived them of their freedom and dignity in many ways. Yet, the Indian poor are so good that they have never complained of their plight. They have been suffering with silence and servitude. So it is our bounden duty to give them education which will enable them to rise and reform themselves. Vivekananda says, "The one thing that is at the root of evils in India is the condition of the poor. The poor in the West are devils; compared to them ours are angels, and it is therefore so much the easier to raise our poor. The only service to be done for our lower classes is to give them education, to develop their lost individuality." 24

Nevertheless, Vivekananda emphasizes that spiritual education is of primary importance. Education in the sense of the manifestation of the innate divinity alone can make man free truly and totally. It alone can give him or her the dignity in the deepest sense. "Education is the manifestation of the perfection already in man", 25 says Vivekananda. So the duty of the teacher is to remove the obstructions to the manifestation of perfection. Teachers have to clear the way to the manifestation without interfering. Besides clearing the way to the manifestation, the educators have to remind the poor and downtrodden of their past. The people belonging to lower castes contributed a lot to Indian culture and values. They were the fathers of all that is noble and beautiful in
Hinduism. They were also infinitely moral than the so-called higher class of people. They were also men of genius. Thus education has to save the Indian poor without being further drowned in Tamas. They should be taught that they are potentially the embodiment of infinite perfection. They have to strive for making it actual. They are capable of attaining exalted position like others. Education should give them the opportunity to have their perfection manifested. Teachers should be conscious and honest inspirers of the poor and the uneducated to transform themselves. "There can be no doubt that a society with the help of such wise guides advances faster than the one without it. But it is equally certain that such guides will rise up in the societies that are now without them and will lead them to equally rapid progress in the future."

Referring to the education that India needs, Vivekananda contends that the Vedantic education of creating faith in oneself has to be put into practice. The Vedantic education should be imparted to the masses of India and not be confined to a few. India failed to progress because education was the monopoly of the upper class people. The whole education and intelligence were cornered by the few. A handful of people controlled the knowledge of the land. A nation advances only to the extent its people are educated. No race can progress without its masses being educated. It is only when the masses live a life of freedom and dignity that a country develops. So it is necessary that the knowledge of the land
is given to the masses. The intelligence and wisdom of India should be shared with its masses.

The status of the Indian poor will grow only when education is spread among them. It is only when the masses are properly educated that we shed our contempt for them. We will stop treating them as born slaves. We will not condemn them to remain as born slaves. The educated masses will no more hypnotise themselves that they are low. When once he is properly educated the Brahman in him will rise. The educators therefore encourage the masses to quickly realize the Brahman in them. We should tell them that they are human beings as anybody else in the world. We have to encourage them to have courage to raise their heads with freedom and dignity. We have to make them to strive hard till the goal of achieving freedom and dignity is reached through education.

Vivekananda says,

"Education, education, education alone! Traveling through many cities of Europe and observing in them the comforts and education of even the poor people, there was brought to my mind the state of our own poor people, and I used to shed tears. What made the difference? Education was the answer I got. Through education comes faith in one's own Self, and through faith in one's own Self the inherent Brahman is waking up in them, while the Brahman in us is gradually becoming dormant." Swami further says, "In New York I used to observe the Irish colonists come downtrodden, haggard-looking, destitute of all possessions at home, penniless, and wooden-headed—with their only belongings, a stick and a bundle of rags hanging at the end of it, fright in their steps, alarm in their eyes. A different spectacle in six months—the man walks upright, his attire is changed! In his eyes and steps there is no more sign of fright. What is the
cause? Our Vedanta says that Irishman was kept surrounded by contempt in his own country—the whole of nature was telling him with one voice, Pat, 'you have no more hope, you are born a slave and will remain so.' Having been told from his birth, Pat believed in it and hypnotized himself that he was very low, and the Brahman in him shrank away. While no sooner had he landed in America than he heard the shout going up on all sides, Pat, you are a man as we are. It is man who has done all, a man like you and me can do everything: have courage! Pat raised his head and saw that it was so, the Brahman within woke up. 27

THE DIGNITY OF THE WOMEN

Swami Vivekananda is the champion of the freedom and dignity of women. In India, along with the masses, women should be liberated from shackles of inferiority and suppression. The status of women should be enhanced by giving them education. Like men, women are also potentially divine and perfect. They should be educated so that they can manifest the inner perfection. They should be educated by introducing them to the ancient Hindu scriptures. In the past, the Indian women excelled men in many ways. The ancient women were known for their scholarship and character. Gargi, Sita, Savithri and Dayamanthi are a few examples of women who were revered. The Indian women should firstly be made fearless like Sanghamitra, Lila, Ahalya Bai, and Mira Bai. They should be inspired to mould their own lives in the light of the ideal characters. They should devote themselves to lofty principles of selflessness. 28 Women should be made pure, selfless and strong. They should be allowed to develop their faculties—physical, vital,
mental and spiritual - through education. They should be made to live rightly and efficiently. They should be allowed to determine themselves by giving them scriptural and science education. Swami said, "Our right of interference is limited entirely to giving education. Women must be put in a position to solve their own problems in their own way. No one can or ought to do this for them. And our Indian women are as capable of doing it as any in the world."29

Women will achieve freedom and dignity only when they are given a positive kind of education which contributes to their holistic development. It teaches them the truth that they are capable of everything that men are capable. Women should be allowed to reform themselves by imparting to them education by which they can become free. "Educate your women first and leave them to themselves; then they will tell you what reforms are necessary for them."30 Education should liberate them from servile dependence on men. It should liberate them from the negative attitude of thinking that they are inferior to men. They should be trained to think that their fate is not permanent. They are capable of shaping their future. They are not for ever condemned to their plight. It is due to ignorance and superstition that they are suppressed for ages. Women need not weep their eyes out at their misfortunes. They should acquire education which gives them the spirit of valour and heroism. They should be made to live a life of
self service and self-defence. Women should therefore be given that education by which, as Vivekananda puts it, "character is formed, strength of mind is increased, the intellect is expanded, and by which one can stand on one's own feet."31

Vivekananda maintains that education should teach the women what chastity means. Chastity is the heritage of Indian women. Education has to intensify the ideal of chastity. The value of chastity will give them in dignity unique to Indian women. Observance of chastity gives them a strong character. Character gives them the strength of being free and dignified. It protects them from being exploited in all stages of life. Chastity gives them the courage whether married or unmarried. They will not be afraid under any circumstances. Even an unmarried woman or a widow will face life boldly. Such women will never degrade themselves. Nor will they give up their lives. Vivekananda expresses the need for training some women in the ideal of renunciation. India requires women who will take up the vow of virginity. They will be the women who are the embodiment of the virtue of chastity. Chastity is the birth right of the Indian women from the ancient times. Along with the teaching and practice of chastity, women should be taught science education which enables them to become employable and economically independent. This will bring about a revolution in the thoughts and aspirations of women. It will give them faith in themselves and put an end to all that is detrimental
to their freedom and dignity. Vivekananda says, "Studying the present needs of the age, it seems imperative to train some women up in the ideal of renunciation, so that they will take up the vow of lifelong virginity, fired with the strength of that virtue of chastity which is innate in their life blood from hoary antiquity. Along with that they should be taught sciences and other things which would be of benefit, not only to them but to others as well, and knowing this they would easily learn these things and feel pleasure in doing so. Our motherland requires for her well-being some of her children to become such pure-souled Brahmacharins and Brahmacharinis."  

Vivekananda says that it was the Buddha who recognized women's right to an equal place in religion. He gave them the opportunity to join the Buddhist Sangha and seek their salvation. But the Swami says that the Vedic declaration that one and the same Self is present in men as well as women forms a basis for the equality of women. Women are the living embodiment of the divine mother. Recognition of this fact is the best means of raising the status of women. But oblivious of this fact, women are degraded and branded as being incompetent for the study of the Vedas. They are deprived of their rights to knowledge, freedom and dignity. But the history shows that there were revered women of knowledge and memory. In the Vedic and Upanishadic period, Maitrayi and Gargi were as wise as the Rishis. They challenged even the erudite
scholars like Yajnavalkya in a discussion about Brahman. Women in the past were entitled to spiritual knowledge, the highest of all knowledge. So they should be given the same kind of status to them even now. They deserve all respect and dignity in the present also. Our culture is known for the reverence of women. Where women are respected there even Gods feels delighted. Freedom and dignity of women are required for a family or a nation to prosper. Women should be regarded and respected for the prosperity of a nation or a race. Vivekananda declared, "All nations have attained greatness by paying proper respect to women. That country and that nation which do not respect women have never become great, nor will ever be in future. The principal reason why your race has so much degenerated is that you have no respect for these living images of Shakti.... There is no hope of rise for that family or country where there is no estimation of women, where they live in sadness. For this reason, they have to be raised first; and an ideal Math has to be started for them."  

Vivekananda maintains that women should not be kept aloof from the mainstream of society. They should be allowed to participate in the matters of the State also. This is possible only when they are given proper education. Women are talented and capable of accomplishments. They should be sent out to see the world and the status of women abroad. Mere reading of books is not enough. Traveling will expand the horizon of women. Only
then they attain freedom and dignity. Women must be allowed to liberate themselves from the tyranny of men who behave like their lords. They should not be allowed to die as idiots and soulless tools of men. Around education and empowerment is the only way to ameliorate women from their destitution and drudgery. Vivekananda holds that India has been backward because women are not being treated with respect and dignity they deserve. Women is the incarnation of infinite power (Shakti). The powers of Motherhood signify regeneration. Nothing can regenerate without Motherhood. That country is the weakest wherein women are dishonoured. Nothing can be accomplished without the grace of Shakti. So women have been worshipped with a purity of heart. They should be revered and looked upon as Mother. Mother’s grace is superior to Father’s grace.\(^4\) Vivekananda regards Mother worship as a distinct philosophy in itself. The mother as the embodiment of power is the custodian of man. Mother represents the impartial energy of the universe. The world is a play of the mother. Motherhood is behind all phenomena. Shakti means universal power. Vivekananda pleads us to recognize the fact that woman is all powerful. Our attitude towards women should be founded on the fact that she is the power manifesting in both the male and the female. Our ethics should be built upon the concept of Motherhood, since mother stands the purity of mind, body and heart. That is why woman as the mother deserves not only dignity
but worship. Even as wife and daughter woman deserves the
greatest position in life.35

HUMAN RIGHTS AND VEDANTA

Dignity of the human being is an important problem of
modern times. It is particularly significant for those who try to
solve the social problems from secular point of view. The question
of dignity is often discussed from a non-religious point of view. But
Vivekananda could not be entirely secular in talking about the
dignity of the person. Nevertheless, he did not disapprove of the
secular approach to it. He sincerely welcomed the non-religious
approach to the problem of human freedom and dignity. He even
entertained the idea that the depressed classes of people would
seize power in future. This idea seems to be entirely political and
non-religious. He was very much concerned with a radical social
transformation of India in particular. But his approach to social
reform is predominantly religious. He firmly believed that India
could be transformed through the religion of Vedanta. Freedom
and equality in their true sense are possible through spirituality. It
is only on the Advaitic notion of divinity that the dignity of the
individual is meaningful. Vivekananda firmly believed in the
fundamental dignity of every one. Even the depressed classes and
scavengers deserve full dignity and as much dignity as the elite.

In talking about the dignity of the human person,
Vivekananda is quite modern and secular also. But he wanted it to
be tackled through the religious means. He was determined to bring about human dignity through spirituality. He sought to uplift the masses through the principles of social justice, equality of all, and universal brotherhood. He wanted to give them an honourable place in society by eradicating all the barriers. He urged us to brush aside superstition, wrong customs and practices to establish the human dignity. He wanted to ignore even the religious texts that go against the dignity of all. To him, the Vedantic idea that all are divine is sufficient for the justification of the dignity of every person. He did not seek the authority of the ancient scriptures while pleading for the dignity of all. Vivekananda's maintained that anything that speaks of inequality is impure and falsehood. Having visited Europe and America, Vivekananda understood the plight of the Indian masses. He shed tears over the pathetic condition of our people. He wanted to rise them by removing their poverty. He wanted to uplift them through education, spiritual and secular. He strived hard for their justice, equality and dignity. He opposed to social hierarchy based on birth. He regarded all these issues as the fundamental rights of the human beings. In this sense Vivekananda could be said to have fought for human rights in his own way. Although, Universal Declaration of Human Rights took place much later than Vivekananda's demise, he fought for human rights on the spiritual grounds. Although he kept himself away
from politics, he gave a clear social orientation to his spirituality. He tried to solve contemporary social problems through religion.

Vivekananda's concern for human dignity reminds us of the Preamble and the many Articles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted and proclaimed by the United Nations General Assembly Resolution 217 (III) on 10 December 1948. The Preamble of the Declaration says, "The recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all the members of human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world." It also says that disregard and contempt for human rights have resulted in barbarous acts which have outraged the conscience of humankind. It proclaims that the freedom of speech, and belief, and freedom from fear and want are the highest aspiration of the common people. It declares that if people are not to be compelled to take recourse to rebellion against tyranny and oppression, the human rights should be protected by the rule of law. Friendly relations among people and nations have to be promoted. The United Nations reaffirms its faith in fundamental rights, dignity and the worth of the human person. It declares its determination to promote the better standards of life and equal rights to all. The members of the organization have pledged themselves to promote universal respect for observance of human rights and fundamental freedoms. They affirmed that a common understanding of these rights and freedoms is of the greatest
importance for the full realization of this pledge. The realization of these rights and freedoms should be achieved by teaching and education.37

The first article of the Declaration says that all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and endowed with reason and conscience. So they should act in a spirit of brotherhood towards one another. The second article declares that everyone is entitled to all these rights and freedoms irrespective of the distinction of race, religion, colour, language, sex or nation. No distinction shall be made on the basis of the political, jurisdictional status of the country to which a person belongs. Article three, four and five say that every person has the right to life, liberty and security and so nobody should be held in slavery, torture, cruelty or degradation. Articles six, seven and eight proclaim that everyone has the right to be recognized as a person before law, to be protected by the law from the acts of violating his or her rights and freedoms. Articles sixteen and seventeen say that every man and woman has the right to marry, have a family and own property. Article eighteen, nineteen and twenty say that everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience, religion, expression and peaceful assembly. Articles twenty one, two and three declare that everyone has the right to take part in the governance of his or her country, to social security and to work with equal pay. Articles twenty four, five and six say that everyone has the right to leisure, standard of living and
free education of one's choice. Articles twenty seven and twenty eight say that everyone has the right to freely participate in the cultural life of the community and to realize the rights and freedoms set forth in the Declaration. And the articles twenty nine and thirty declare that everyone has duties to his or her community in which alone one can develop his personality. Everyone has the duty to respect others' rights and freedoms as he respects his or her own. Everyone has to recognize the limitation of his or her rights and freedoms by the law. No one should exercise them in the manner that would jeopardize the purpose of United Nations Declaration. Neither the Preamble nor the Articles of the Declaration should be interpreted in the way that aims at the destruction of the rights and freedoms enshrined therein.

It is not only the law, national or international, that contributes to the protection of human rights and freedoms. Even religion can contribute to the cause of rights and freedoms. Religious contribution to them is more fundamental since religion seeks to protect them by recognizing the spiritual dimension of the individual. For instance, Buddhism seeks to establish the equality freedom and dignity of the people on the ground that no person has an exclusive being. The individual does not have a self which has its own, unique being. Everybody exists only in mutual relationship and dependent origination. So it is wrong to assume that one has a separate and privileged being. Everyone is equal
and the same as the other. One's welfare is inextricably related to that of the others. So it is essential to have compassion and love for the other. Love and compassion are possible since we are devoid of any self-centred being. It is one's duty to love the other and treat the other as one treats oneself. In this, United Nations Declaration of Human rights and duties (Article 29) is in correspondence with the tenets of Buddhism. Similarly, Vivekananda argues that the Hindu philosophy of religion can also contribute to the human rights through its conception of the casteless, colourless, sexless Spirit. The oneness of the Spirit rejects the idea of exclusion and discrimination. Caste in Hinduism, according Vivekananda, is meant for the heritage of profession. It is meant for the separation of work and practices. It should not lead to identities that would separate people into groups. It should not be treated as the source of division and conflict among people. It should be understood as the division of labour only and not the division of labourers. Keeping in view of the sameness of the spirit, caste should not be allowed to lead to exclusive identities. Caste simply means the diversity of professions and not the division of humanity as higher and lower. There is no scope for the hierarchy of human beings in the framework of the Hindu concept of the oneness of the Spirit and humanity. The Hindu ethics found on its metaphysics of oneness
encompasses the discourse of human rights and duties in a comprehensive manner.

"The person who has attained the ultimate freedom of realizing the Atman no more sees the 'other' as his opponent. He lives for the good of all spontaneously and naturally. The religious view of human rights pertains to the value of moksha... The person who, in this life, has attained the *summun bonum* of life, although active in life, no longer acts from any selfish impulse or even from a sense of obligation to others. In fact, the common laws of social morality and ritual which are significant only in reference to one striving for perfection are meaningless to him. So much so that impulse and desire become one to him. He is not then realizing virtue but revealing it. It is clear that in this form of liberation (*moksha*) the liberated person may see no 'other' vis-à-vis whose rights may be asserted."^41

**SPIRITUAL HUMANISM**

The humanism of Vivekananda is entirely different from that of scientific humanism which advocates the primacy of the human being over everything in the world. Scientific humanism is anthropocentric in that it treats nature as the object of human enjoyment. It is materialistic in character and treats the material progress of man as its chief aim. Scientific adventure and development is regarded as the prime purpose of human existence. Technological advancement is considered to be the mainstay of the scientific humanism. Civilization and urbanization constitute the consequence of scientific humanism. Similarly Vivekananda's humanism is different from that of the Marxian humanism which is similar to that of scientific humanism. Marxism is humanistic in the sense that it looks at human history from a purely materialistic
point of view. Like science, it also dispenses with spirit or God. It conceives human progress entirely in terms of economics and industrialization. Marxism seeks to uphold human dignity by liberating man from the sense of alienation. Alienation arises when the products of labour are out of the reach of the labourer. It arises when the objects of creation overshadow the creator. Humanism consists in the elimination of alienation by making the products as the objects of enjoyment. It consists in bringing the economic conditions under the control of humanity. The economy must not dominate man. Domination of economy contradicts the nature of man and dehumanizes him. Labour should not only be a means of sustaining life but a creative activity by which man makes and moulds himself. This is possible when man gains the freedom of working not only for bread but also out of joy and happiness.

Similarly Vivekananda's humanism is also different from that of the atheistic existentialism of Jean Paul Sartre. Sartre says that his brand of humanism consists in giving man the place of God. Man is the architect of his life. Man is the being of total freedom since there is no God. Nothing can determine man except himself. Man is the being of autonomous choice. He is a being of self-determinism. Humanism consists in saying that man is responsible not only for his life but also for the society. Man can change his life and the world. Nothing limits his freedom and
choice. Man is his own limitation. In the absence of God, man is also the creator of values. Man has the power of creating new values also. Thus Sartre's humanism consists in making man a being of freedom, choice and responsibility, but without any spirituality or religion. So it may be said that the Sartrian humanism has an element of negativism and nihilism.43

But Vivekananda's humanism is out and out spiritual in character. It is rooted in the metaphysical realm of the absolute Spirit. Universal spirit which is omnipotent and omniscient is the basis of Vivekananda's humanism. It consists in his contention that man is the maker of his destiny. He holds that man is all powerful since he is nothing but the Spirit. When once we realize that we are not the body but the spirit one overcomes all boundaries. Man is not limited by the circumstances. He is not confined to the adjuncts of the body. The ideal man is one who is beyond his caste, religion, race or religion. Vivekananda's humanism consists in giving freedom to man by asking him to manifest the perfection that is already there in him. Man is a being of perfection. The poor and the downtrodden are also potentially perfect. Humanism is giving them the opportunity of manifesting their divinity. Vivekananda strived hard to uplift the Indian masses and women. He deeply felt the need for eradicating their ignorance and poverty by giving them education. He says,

"Let us pray, 'lead kindly light'- a beam will come through the dark, and a hand will be strengthened
forth to lead us. I always pray for you: you must pray for me. Let us each pray day and night for the downtrodden millions of India who are held fast by poverty, priestcraft and tyranny. pray day and night for them.... who feels there for the two hundred millions of men and women sunken for ever in poverty and ignorance? What is the way out? Who feel for them? They cannot find light or education. Who will bring the light to them? who will travel from door to door bringing education to them? Let these people be your god: think for them, work for them, pray for them incessantly- the Lord will show the way."

Vivekananda's humanism also consists in his advocacy of selfless service to the poor and women. He held that service to the downtrodden is the service to God. Giving without asking anything in return is the principle of true service. Whole life is meant for giving willingly and voluntarily. Life is not meant for accumulation but to give. Nature is of the essence of giving. So everyone is bound by nature which compels us to live the life of giving without expectation. But the secret is that we receive only when we give. The one who does not give will stagnate and degenerate. Vivekananda's dynamic humanism consists in asking us to work for the freedom and dignity of the poor by serving them. Serving the poor with the feeling of love is necessary. We have to give strength to the weak, for weakness is the cause of all evils. No one can be happy until all are happy. No one can attain true liberty until every being attains it. When you hurt anyone you hurt yourself. He is a yogi who sees himself in the whole universe and the whole universe in himself. Self-sacrifice is the bedrock of Swami's concept spiritual humanism. It also consists in his notion
of self-assertion of striving to overcome the constraints through concentration and character. The twin principles of concentration and character can uplift man to the stature of superman. Nothing is impossible to the person who is sincere and hard working. He is the maker of his destiny which is heaven. He can become a person of dignity, freedom and equality. He says, "Look upon all as your equal, cleanse yourself of the primal sin of inequality. We are all equal and must not think 'I am good and you are bad, and I am trying to reclaim you'. Equality is the sign of the free. Jesus came to pagans and sinners and lived with them. He never set himself on a pedestal. Only sinner sees sin. See not man, see only the Lord. We manufacture our own heaven and can make a heaven even in hell."

Vivekananda's humanism is clearly evident in his contention that there is absolutely no place for privileges in life. Indian society based on the gradation in society accords privileges to some in the name of the superiority of the race. But when all are the children of God there is no scope for superiority. The principle of privileges to a few is the negation of the principle of equality. It goes against the dignity that is inherent in everyone. Everyone including the worker or the fisherman is the spirit. Everyone is the master of his or her profession. One cannot perform the duty of another. So one should not feel superior to the other. Vivekananda says that the only thing that one can do is to perform one's duty with perfection.
All professions are equal in importance. All are founded on the principle of that work is worship. One can perform a particular duty in social life. For instance, one can govern a country. The other can mend a pair of shoes. But that can not be a reason to think that the former is greater than the latter. Vivekananda asks, "I am clever in mending shoes, you are clever in reading the Vedas, but that is no reason why you should trample on my head. Why if one commits murder should be praised, and if another steals an apple why should he be hanged?"

There is absolutely no ground for privilege for anyone. Equality is the principle of nature and dignity of all is the norm of life. Dignity is the first condition of growth. Nobody should be forced to work as a slave and just for wages. It amounts to selling one's body to the employer. It means placing one's being at other's disposal in order to seek sustenance. One should work in the spirit of dedication and with a sense of dignity and freedom. It is only through the work done in a spirit of dedication and service that one lives a life of dignity and freedom. This sense of human dignity must come to all and to Indians in particular. It should dawn on our working classes. Only then the millions of the masses will be able to rise to the full stature of citizenship. Vivekananda says, "When I work under somebody for a wage, I temporarily place my body at his disposal in order to see sustenance of the soul comes only through all such work done in a spirit of dedication and
service in a context of dignity and freedom. If I do that work only for the sustenance of the body, it becomes slavery; it becomes the negation of human dignity." Thus Vivekananda's concept of humanism consists in his attempt at creating a sense of dignity and self respect through spirituality. This is possible through imparting to people the man-making education which is a combination of both spiritual and secular ideals. It includes both the quantitative and qualitative improvement of the individual and elevation of the masses through universal religion which says that all are the children of immortality. Freedom and dignity come by the teaching of the highest truths of Indian spirituality. Vivekananda said, "Teach yourselves, teach everyone his real nature; call upon the sleeping soul and see how it awakes. Power will come, glory will come, goodness will come, when this sleeping soul of man is roused to self-conscious activity."48

Further, it may be said that Vivekananda is a humanist in the sense that he strived for the creation of a new humanity. He dreamt of the emergence of a new generation of human beings who are anchored in spirituality. He held that the problems of the world are the problems of the inner self. Soul is the only instrument of progress and development. Transformation of the soul brings about the transformation of society. In this sense his brand of humanism is not the European humanism which is based on the European Renaissance. It is not even the humanism of
Christianity. His is the humanism of the Vedanta which is all inclusive, universal and eternal. *Since the spiritual foundation of this humanism is Vedantic we may call it Vedantic Humanism. But Vivekananda took care not to give it that label because he thought that it might be then thought to have sectarian lebel,*⁹⁹ says Das Gupta.

Vivekananda's humanism is one of global outlook and internationalism. He said that the whole universe is one family. Everything in it is interconnected and nothing can move without moving the other. One atom in the universe cannot move without dragging the whole world along with it. So also there cannot be any progress without the progress of the last and the least. Man is universal and everyone one is entitled to a life of dignity and freedom. Each one has to work for the freedom and dignity of the other. The truth of the oneness of humanity is the source of Vivekananda's humanism. One's welfare is intrinsically connected with the welfare of all and vice versa. The one spirit that is all pervading should guide our actions. Only actions guided by the spirit are free from evil of self-centeredness. The spirit generates true love which solves all the problems. One should think globally and act as an international citizen. Vivekananda visualized the international order well before the UNO was founded in 1946. To him politics is basically sectarian and purely a quest for power. It is meant for gaining power for a group or class or for country. He
was deeply convinced that the political power can never bring about a happy and unified world. It is only spirituality especially that of the Vedanta can achieve a world of oneness and unity. Thus Vivekananda's humanism is one of universalism based on the spiritualism of oneness of humanity. "And this sense of belonging to the world at large gave Vivekananda his idea of internationalism which was to him more than a political concept. It was his human approach to problems which gave him his international outlook. If you go deep into it you will discover that it was but an aspect of his ideal of universal religion. What is true about man in one country must be necessarily true about human nature in any country."80

THE TRUE BRAHMIN

Vivekananda admits that in India caste is the greatest barrier to the freedom and dignity of the human person. The system of caste along with its blemish of untouchability has been precluding the development of the human personality. It has also been alleged to be a stumbling block of the progress of India as a nation. This is because caste has excluded the majority of the people of India from the mainstream of development. It has deprived the Indian masses of their dignity of living a decent life. It has prevented the downtrodden from proving their worth and stifled the rights of the poor and suppressed them. It has taken away the fundamental freedoms that a person requires to lead a life of minimum dignity and decency.
Vivekananda deplores that the Indian masses are being treated as worse than the animals. The poverty and plight have degraded them to the sub-human level. So Vivekananda contends that it is necessary to break down the caste system. But he says that the way to break down the caste is not by organizing community dinners and arranging inter-caste marriages. He argues that it is only by elevating oneself to the level of an ideal person that we have to breakdown the caste system. Our ancestors have regarded Brahmin as the ideal person. Brahmin does not mean one who is born in the Brahmin community but one who has realized the Vedantic truth of infinite consciousness and bliss. Brahmin is one who has seen the sameness and oneness in everybody. Brahmin belongs to the high caste not because of birth but because he has realized the highest truth. He is like one of our eminent Rishis who realized and practically lived the teachings of the Vedas. "You are of the high caste when you can trace your ancestry to a Rishi, and not otherwise."81

According to Vivekananda the ideal of high or low is determined not by birth but by the culture of the person. He is Brahmin who lives a life of spiritual culture and renunciation. Brahminess contains not in the worldliness but in the abundance of wisdom. The Brahmin is not amenable to any kind of laws. He is not governed even by kings. His body cannot be hurt and his self cannot degrade. His personality cannot be subjected to slavery
and indignity. The Brahmin is one who has liberated himself from all kinds of bondage. He is free from social and psychological factors of bondage. He does not subject himself to the norms which exclude him from the rest of humanity.

Further, the Brahmin is one who has overcome selfishness and lives for others' welfare and enlightenment. He works for propagating wisdom and power of love. A society of Brahmins will be free of the evils. It will be a welfare society in the true sense. There will be no degradation of humanity. It requires no laws or regulations, for it is constituted by the individuals who govern themselves. It is inhabited by the noble men and women who are spiritually enlightened and morally good. It is beyond any government since it is filled with only one caste, namely, the Brahmin caste comprising people who are noble in all respects. Vivekananda refers to Mahabharata as saying that in the beginning the whole world was inhabited by the Brahmins only. Later on, they began to degenerate, degrade and divided into different castes.

Vivekananda hopes that these people who were divided into different castes will go back to their origin. They will become Brahmins again. The cycle of change will turn round. All those who are non-Brahmins, namely, the ignoble people will surely become Brahmins, namely, the noble ones. Vivekananda draws our attention to the fact that it is possible for people to uplift themselves to the level of Brahmins. Social change does not mean
degrading the Brahmins to the level of non-Brahmins. It is not bringing the 'higher' class of people to the 'lower' class. But social reform consists in upgrading ourselves to the level of Brahmins. It consists in transforming ourselves spiritually in terms of the Vedanta. True social reform consists in people becoming the ideal Brahmins. We have to strive to realize the ideal of Brahminhood. "There is a law laid on each one of you in this land by your ancestors, whether you are Aryans or non-Aryans, Rishis or Brahmins, or the very lowest outcastes. The command is the same to you all, that you must make progress without stopping, and that from the highest man to the lowest Pariah, every one in this country has to try to become the ideal Brahmin."

To Vivekananda, the solution to the question of caste in India does not consists in degrading those who are already in the high place. It does not consists in transforming the men of renunciation into the men of enjoyment. Caste problem cannot be solved by making people to run amuck through food and drink. It does not mean people crossing the limits of spiritual life and embrace materialistic life. Real solution to the problem of caste lies in every one of us by living according to the diatates of the Vedantic religion. The solution consists in attaining the spirituality by all. Vivekananda says that the Vedantic idea of equality of all is applicable not only to India but also to the world. The Vedantic idea of the Brahminhood is meant to raise the status of humanity
as a whole. Caste in the sense of a noble Brahmin means realization of the great ideal of uplifting of oneself by progressing gradually towards the Brahminness. The true Brahmin is one who is "non-resisting, calm, study, worshipful, pure and meditative." 83

The person who is free and dignified does not allow himself to any kind of degradation. He does not also degrade anybody or anything in the world. He is divine and regards others with divinity. He is the Supreme Being and sees the Supreme Being in everybody. Vivekananda says that people can become true Brahmin on their own choice and free will. No amount of cursing those who are ignoble is of any use. It is no good to abuse them. It does not work to vilify them. It is only through love and sympathy that we can change people. India was indeed a great nation which stood for the freedom and dignity of all. It taught the eternal truth that united all people. But today India is suffering from the problem of discrimination of people by caste, colour and creed. The nation believes in its countrymen to try their best to eradicate the evils.

We have to awaken the people to the situation and to their responsibility for it. The nation was great in the past. We have to do greater things to reform it. We have to be true patriots and love those who did great things in the past. The people of India have been good, pure and gentle but they were also tyrannized and brutalized. But the Spirit will certainly triumph in the long run if we strive steadfastly. Let us not condemn anybody or any
institution. The institution of caste has been the bane of the freedom and dignity of the person. Caste has been very strong in the lives of the Indians. It appears to be an indispensable part of our life. If caste is so essential to India let us have it in a different sense. We may have caste in the sense of purity, culture and self-sacrifice. Vivekananda says,

"Therefore utter no words of condemnation. Close your lips and open your hearts. Work out the salvation of this land and of the whole world, each of you thinking that the entire burden is on your shoulders. Carry the light and life of Vedanta to every door, and rouse up the divinity that is hidden within every soul. Then, whatever may be the measure of your success, you will have this satisfaction that you have lived, worked and died for a great cause. In the success of this cause, however brought about, is centred the salvation of humanity here and hereafter."54
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