CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION
This chapter is devoted to a critical and comparative estimate of Swami Vivekananda's philosophy of the dignity of the human person as it has been expounded in the preceding chapters. Firstly, we will critically examine Vivekananda's conception of the dignity of the human person in relation to his views on caste and untouchability. Secondly, we will discuss Vivekananda's ideas on human dignity in comparison with the views expressed by M.K. Gandhi and B.R. Ambedkar on human dignity and caste and untouchability. Thirdly, we will give a critical account of the significance of Vivekananda's conception of human dignity rooted in divinity for the protection of human rights. And finally, we will bring out in brief the relevance of Vivekananda's philosophy as a whole for the emergence of India as a developed nation.
Before giving a critical and comparative estimate of Vivekananda's doctrine of the dignity of the human person, let us present a brief review of themes discussed in the preceding chapters. In Chapter - I, viz., 'Introduction', the origin and meaning of the term "dignity" has been given. The importance of the issue of the dignity of the human person in the history of philosophy, the degrading and suppression of man by man, and the constant effort of man to restore the lost dignity have been explained in brief. The significance of relationality based on the spiritual identification of the individuals has also been brought out. The importance of Vivekananda's theory of practical Vedanta for the preservation of the dignity of the person has also been discussed in brief in this chapter. In Chapter - II entitled 'The Life and Philosophy of Swami Vivekananda' the important events in Vivekananda's life like his birth and childhood, his education and his spiritual awakening have been presented in a considerable detail. Vivekananda's participation in the parliament of world religions, the core of his philosophy, and the aims of the Ramakrishna Mission established by Vivekananda have also been explained in this chapter. In Chapter - III, namely, 'The Concept of Man and Dignity-A Philosophical Perspective', a detailed exposition of the Upanishadic, the Buddhist, the Marxist and the Existentialist conception of man and dignity has been given. A brief account Tagore's, Mahatma Gandhi's, B.R. Ambedkar's,
Krishnamurti's and Vivekananda's views on man and dignity has also been given in this chapter.

In Chapter – IV, viz., 'Vivekananda's Conception of the Dignity of the Human Person – A Metaphysical Perspective' we have discussed in depth Vivekananda's doctrines of divinity and dignity, the real and apparent man, to be human is to be free, and perfection and dignity. We have also expounded his idea that man is the maker of his destiny and elucidated Raja Yoga as the means of attaining the divinity and dignity by the individual. And in Chapter – V, namely, 'Vivekananda's Conception of the Dignity of the Human Person – A Social Perspective', the implications of Vivekananda's conception of divine dignity for the individual and social well-being have been explained. The themes such as the practical Vedanta, the problem of privileges, universal brotherhood, education of the masses and women, and human rights have been discussed here. Further, the issues of spiritual humanism and the true Brahmin as conceived by Vivekananda have also been dealt with in detail in this chapter.

Undoubtedly, Vivekananda is one of the greatest modern Indian thinkers who has given a wholistic philosophy of the freedom and dignity of the human person. His philosophy is founded on the profound spirituality of the Vedas, the ancient scriptures, which have still been exerting influence on the Indian psyche and society. All through his speeches and writings
Vivekananda has emphasized the possibility of recovering the lost dignity and freedom of the individual through the realization and practice of the Upanishadic principles of the oneness of the spirit and the unity of humanity. He has gone to the extent of saying that spirituality and the Vedantic spirituality in particular is the only way of making the human being truly free and dignified. But it may be held that the Hindu tradition includes not only the Vedas and the Upanishads but also several other scriptures like the epics and puranas which have enunciated the ideals like the Vama dharmas and Ashrama dharmas. Caste also forms part of Hinduism which has its moorings in the texts that have subscribed to the practice of caste coupled with untouchability. And it has often been held by many scholars and reformers of the Hindu society that Hinduism cannot assure its members of freedom and dignity without eradicating the system of caste. Caste has been considered to be a barrier to the equality and fraternity of the people. It is not possible to conceive of the dignity and freedom of the people without equality and fraternity.

Therefore it is necessary to critically examine Vivekananda's views on human dignity and freedom in the light of his views on caste. It may be held that Vivekananda's ideas on caste are not clear but controversial. He has expressed enigmatic and equivocal opinions on caste. He says that caste in Hinduism is a great institution that the Lord gave to humanity. The system of caste is
a natural social order. It came into existence as the result of people performing certain duties for the benefit of society. People discharging particular duties formed into groups which have been identified as certain castes. Vivekananda holds that it is in the nature of society that it gives rise to a variety of groups of people depending upon the work that a particular group of people discharge. Sharing of the duties is required for mutual benefit and harmonious living. No single individual can do all the work that a society requires. No group can perform all the duties that a community needs. A group of people has to perform a particular kind of duties warranted by the society. Thus there is a need for diversified groups of people performing diversified activities.

Vivekananda therefore says that the Hindu society is constitutive of four groups of people, namely, Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vysyas and Shudras. The Brahmin group recites the Vedas the Kshatriya group governs the society, the vysya group tills the land, and the shudra group discharges the rest of the duties like washing clothes, mending shoes and so on. Vivekananda argues that this kind of sharing of the duties is good for the society. Each group takes up its duties as its tradition and convention and attains perfection in that particular kind of profession. It achieves excellence in the profession because of its long association with it. The profession becomes an occupation by heredity and thereby the group becomes an adept in it.
Vivekananda holds that the system of caste in Hinduism establishes order in the society since it promotes strict adherence of people to the professions which they inherit. There is no scope for conflict and confusion regarding the choice of profession. There is no possibility of encroachment of the profession of one group by another group. Life becomes easier and smoother since there is no sense of competition among different professions. The system of caste prevents competition which is the source of disorder in society. People belonging to different castes spontaneously take up the duties that are assigned to them by tradition. The children of the priests will become the priests, the children of the military men will become the military men, the children of the farmers will become the farmer, and the children of the blacksmiths will automatically become the blacksmiths. Thus there will be order and harmony in the society.

Vivekananda says further in defence of the caste system that caste has some value since it acts as a means of preserving the purity of the blood of the people belonging to particular castes. Caste saves the purity of the race in the form of heredity. It protects the traits that are peculiar to people belonging to a particular group. It acts as a natural process of preventing the mixture of the 'superior' race with the 'inferior' one. A superior race can protect itself from being adulterated and degraded by mixing up with the inferior one. Caste also preserves the duties
that a particular group of people have to discharge for the attainment of ultimate liberation through service.

Vivekananda maintains that caste in India has brought about a great fusion of many different races. It is due to the system of caste that the races of different grades and colours have co-existed for a long time. Each race has kept its own distinct conventions and beliefs and yet coexisted with other races. Thus, Vivekananda holds that caste has contributed to the unity in diversity without leading to division and discard. Caste is a glorious institution which was meant to lead the Hindus to their legitimate destiny.

Vivekananda has gone to the extent of saying that the system of caste may remain for ever. What should be removed are the privileges that certain castes are enjoying in the guise of superiority. No caste is superior to other castes. No profession should be regarded as superior to other professions. The one who can recite the Vedas should not think that he is superior to the one who tills the land. The one who rules should not think that he is higher than the one who mends the shoes. Nobody can perform the duty of another. No group can excel the other group in discharging their duties. So no group should think of exploiting and trampling the other groups. And the privileges enjoyed by the so-called higher groups should be abolished. Everyone should be treated as an equal to others and be treated with equal dignity and
freedom. It is not the caste but the privileges that are a barrier to the dignity of all people.

Vivekananda supports the system of caste by saying that in Hinduism caste is a worldly affair meant for the regulation of our relative existence. Caste is a social institution meant for living a social life. By being a member of a particular caste, an individual becomes civilized. It enables the person to live in a civil society. It contributes to a life of community living as against the individualistic living. The person who is a part of a certain caste ceases to be self-centred and individualistic. So a Hindu is always a social being and not individualistic like a Western person. Vivekananda therefore argues that caste distinctions may be maintained at the societal level. Caste can also be allowed at the ceremonial level. In Hinduism there is no place for caste at the metaphysical level of the spirit. Human being is essentially the soul which is casteless, classless, sexless or genderless. Vivekananda says that he has personally no sense of caste since he is a monk who is concerned more with spiritual life.

At the same time, Vivekananda says that the system of caste in Hinduism is a terrible thing which is very rigid. It does not allow the person to lead a life of freedom and dignity. Caste is a great dividing factor leading to the disabolitical custom of untouchability. Caste is a source of exclusion and separation of people. It has given scope for some to enjoy the privileges to the suppression and
exclusion of many others. It has legislated an eternal degradation for the so-called lower class of people and given the pride of place to the so-called higher class of people.

Vivekananda holds that the heredity system of accepting the occupations kills the person’s latent talents and aptitudes. It stunts the growth of the person as a perfect and wholistic being. There is no freedom to choose the profession one loves. There is no scope for improving upon one’s profession, for there is no scope for competition in the system of caste. And competition keeps the individual alive and ever active. It is required for the growth of the individual as a professional.

Vivekananda contends that the system of caste is the cause of the down fall of India in the past. It is due the disunity of the Indians in the name of caste that several foreign races have conquered India. The practice of caste will lead to a tremendous upheaval in the future also. Vivekananda admits that the so-called fusion of the races that the system of caste brought about was not devoid of injustice and inequality. The system of caste has degraded a certain section of people to the sub-human level. It has condemned them to a life of insults and indignities.

Swami holds that the system of caste leads to a degeneration of races for it promotes a system of in-breeding in the name of the purity of race. By not allowing cohabitation between the races, it stunts the growth of the races physically, mentally and spiritually.
He says that a mixture of different races will produce a strong race in the long run. A superior race when mixed with an inferior one may fall down at the present. But hundreds of years later, the mixture will surely produce a gigantic race once again. So it is wrong to think that the system of caste will protect the purity of a race.

Vivekananda therefore suggests some measures for the eradication of caste in Hinduism and for the establishment of a society devoid of inequality and injustice. Firstly, he says that everybody should be elevated to the level of the Brahmins. Even the so-called untouchables have to be uplifted to the status of the Brahmins by giving them both the spiritual and the secular type of education. We have to tell them that they are human beings like us. The untouchables are our own creation. We have degraded them by crying out 'do not touch, do not touch'. We have to create self-confidence in them through the words of faith and hope.

Secondly, all people have to be raised to the position of Brahmins by investing them with the sacred thread. Everybody has to right to investiture with the holy thread. Everyone has to be allowed to recite the Gayatri mantra. Investiture and Gayatri raises the person to the status of the twice-born, namely, the Brahmins. All people should be allowed to study the sacred scriptures like the Vedas and Upanishads.
Thirdly, the term "Brahmin" has to be understood in its true sense. Brahmin means an ideal person. Brahmanism means the life of perfection and enlightenment. A true Brahmin is not the one who is born in a certain caste but the one who is the preserver of perfection. Brahmanism in this sense has to be protected. More and more people have to be elevated to the level of Brahmins.

Fourthly, the Brahmins should stop claiming superiority over other castes. They should not seek a privileged position in society and exploit others. Instead, they should help others to become Brahmins by giving them the spiritual education. Exploitation in the name of spirituality is the worst kind of spirituality. Brahmins should not shut out the poor masses by practicing untouchability. It is only when the Brahmins themselves help the masses to become the Brahmins that the evils of the caste system will disappear. Even the chandalas have to be raised to the level of the Brahmins.

Fifthly, Vivekananda exhorts the shudras to strive for becoming Brahmins. The Shudras and the untouchables have to protest against the system of caste. They have to assert themselves for their freedom and dignity in the society. If necessary, they have to stop serving the classes above them. They have to show their strength and importance by abstaining from discharging their duties. They are the backbone of all nations, especially India. The society will go without food if the working classes go on a strike. If
the sweeper stops doing their work, the cities will go panic. So it is
wrong to regard the service class of people as being and their work
as being menial. The poor and the labour class of people have to
be awakened to the fact that the substantial part of the fruits of
their labour is being enjoyed by the privileged classes. So they have
to be given the knowledge and power to overcome the suppression
by the higher classes.

Vivekananda maintains that everyone has a right to become
a Brahmin. Nobody can prevent the other from becoming a
Brahmin. Nothing can stop a person who wants to become a
Brahmin. It is thinking that makes a person superior or inferior.
One should stop thinking that one is inferior and weak. So also
any caste can merge itself into the caste of Brahmins. Any group of
people can become Brahmins by learning Sanskrit and the sacred
scriptures.

Vivekananda holds that it is necessary to ban only the
scriptures that have subscribed to the system of caste and
classifies people into water tight compartments. Hinduism has to
adopt only those texts which do not support the suppression of the
weak. It has to reject the texts that have prevented the shudras
from reading the Vedas. The Hindus have to question the sages
and saints who have propagated the diabolical Brahmanism of
exclusion and oppression of a section of people. Hinduism should
propagate only those scriptures which have encouraged the shudras to imitate the customs and manners of the Brahmins.

The last and final measure that Vivekananda suggests for the eradication of the evil of the caste system is that Hinduism has to take Buddhism into its fold. He holds that Buddhism is not opposed to Hinduism, the religion of the Vedas. Buddhism came into the scene as a fulfillment of Hinduism. Buddhism emerged in order to reform Hinduism. Hinduism needs the compassion of Buddhism for the eradication of its caste system. There is no place for caste system in Buddhism, since it preaches equality, liberty and fraternity of all people. The principle of love and compassion taught by the Buddha ensures the life of dignity to all beings.

Vivekananda argues that the Buddha came to fulfill and not to destroy the Vedic religion. His teachings are a logical development and the conclusion of the religion of the Hindus. He brought out the truths hidden in the Vedas and broadcasted them all over the world. He did not discriminate between people in any manner. He taught to all kinds of people, the poor and the ignorant as well as the learned Brahmins. He preached in the people's language of Pali which can be understood and spoken by all. Vivekananda says that Hinduism and Buddhism are not contradictory but complementary to each other. Hinduism needs the heart of the Buddhism whereas Buddhism needs the intellect of Hinduism.
Thus Vivekananda's views on the system of caste in Hinduism are not definite and conclusive. They are controversial in the sense that they are both for and against the system of caste. On the one hand Vivekananda says that caste is a natural order arising out of certain groups of people performing certain duties. Caste is a great social institution meant for people to attain their legitimate destinies. Vivekananda speaks as if caste has had a divine sanction and it aims at producing men of perfection. On the other hand he says that the system of caste is diabolical since it thwarts people's freedom and sense of initiative and competition. Caste divisions have been responsible for the downfall of India and the degradation of its masses and women. So Vivekananda is not clear whether it is possible to bring about the freedom and dignity of the person within the system of caste. He is also not categorical in saying that it is only in the absence of caste that the individual can be assured of freedom and dignity.

However, it is not possible to conceive of a society of people with freedom and dignity within the ambit of caste, for caste means the vertical division of people. Caste is the gradation of people into groups one above the other. It does not allow the equality and freedom required for the dignity of people. So, Vivekananda's contention that the system of caste can be preserved devoid of the privileges by the upper caste people is not tenable. Privileges cannot be eradicated as long as the gradation of people in the name of
caste continues to exist. Nevertheless, Vivekananda's ideas that the shudras and the chandalas have to revolt against their oppressors can be well appreciated. His suggestion that Hinduism has to adopt the Buddhist spirit of compassion for saving the people from degradation and oppression is worthy of serious consideration.

Let us now critically examine Vivekananda's ideas on the dignity of the human person and caste in comparison with the views expressed by M.K. Gandhi and B.R. Ambedkar on these issues.

Vivekananda and Gandhi subscribe to the view that the caste system of Hinduism is responsible for the long survival of Hinduism. Both are of the view that the different castes are like different divisions in an organization. Each division contributes to the welfare of the whole organization and safeguards its interests also.

Vivekananda and Gandhi hold that the system of caste acts as a control over the person's conduct. It makes the individual civil and moral, since it prescribes certain ideals to be followed by the members. Caste prevents people from transgressing certain limits for enjoyment.

Both Vivekananda and Gandhi subscribe to the view that caste promotes the occupations of people on the basis of heredity. It expects that the members of a particular caste remain in that
caste and sincerely discharge their occupations. A Brahmin should not think of doing the occupation assigned to a shudra and a shudra too should not think of becoming a Brahmin, a kshatriya, or a vysya.

Both the thinkers have also held that the system of caste precludes the freedom and dignity of the individual. The practice of untouchability, an offshoot of the caste system, is a blot on India. Both regard the scourge of untouchability as a national shame. They have fought for the elimination of untouchability by asking the lower classes of people to assert freedom and dignity as their birth right. They tried to elevate the untouchables by giving them education and allowing them to take up the professions like medicine and engineering.

Both the thinkers have condemned untouchability and not the caste system. They are not revolutionaries in their attitude to caste system. They are only reactionaries in the sense that they have some how tried to preserve the system of caste since they had an admiration and attachment for Hinduism in which they were born. They tried to reform India without rejecting the system of caste as a whole. They wanted to assure the freedom and dignity of the person by eradicating the practice of untouchability and not the system of caste.

Both Gandhi and Vivekananda have sought to uplift the downtrodden without resorting to legal and political measures.
They aimed at giving freedom and dignity of the person by the spiritual means of seeing the other as an equal in all respects although we differ in our customs and professions. But the difference between them is that while Vivekananda wanted all people to become Brahmins for attaining freedom and dignity, Gandhi wanted every Hindu to become a shudra for bringing about freedom and dignity of all people.

Ambedkar is another modern Indian thinker who has strived hard for the freedom and dignity of the Indian downtrodden. So it will be worthwhile to examine Vivekananda’s views on the dignity of the human person in comparison with Ambedkar.

Both Vivekananda and Ambedkar are of the view that the system of caste in Hinduism is a barrier to the freedom and dignity of the human person. But Vivekananda has tried to provide freedom and dignity to the individual by reforming Hinduism. He sought to bring about a change in the lives of people by eradicating untouchability. But Ambedkar held that freedom and dignity of the Indian masses is possible only when the whole system of Hinduism is rejected. Caste system of degrading the majority by a minority is the essential character of Hinduism. So it is only by rejecting Hinduism that people can gain freedom and dignity.

Both the thinkers have taken recourse to Buddhism as the alternative to Hinduism in ensuring freedom and dignity to Hindus. But Vivekananda has held that Buddhism is a fulfillment of
Hinduism in the sense that Hinduism can adopt the Buddhist principle of compassion and spirit of service for bringing about freedom and dignity to all Hindus. But Ambedkar has maintained that Buddhism is entirely different from Hinduism. Former is opposed to the latter. There is no scope for freedom and dignity of people in Hinduism. So it is only in Buddhism that people can live in freedom and dignity. That is why Ambedkar asked the Indian downtrodden to embrace Buddhism. He converted himself and several other people to Buddhism.

Vivekananda held that only those Hindu scriptures that subscribe to untouchability have to be rejected. The scriptures which do not have any reference to untouchability are sacred, for they have taught the oneness of the spirit and unity of humanity. But Ambedkar held that every text of Hinduism directly or indirectly subscribes to division and degradation of the majority of people. So the entire corpus of the Hindu scriptures has to be rejected to liberate people from oppression.

Ambedkar held that political and legal measures are the only means of ensuring freedom and dignity of the human person. As the architect of the Indian Constitution, he incorporated several provisions for ensuring the life of freedom and dignity to the downtrodden. Vivekananda held that real change in the lives of people is possible only through spirituality. It is only by awakening people to their inner divinity that they can lead the lives of freedom
and dignity. Inner change is deeper and long lasting than the outward measures of politics and law.

Vivekananda wanted the Indian downtrodden to achieve freedom and dignity by becoming the Brahmins in the sense of being ideal and perfect people. Everyone has the right of going upwards and becoming a Brahmin who is a noble person. But Ambedkar wanted the downtrodden to come out of Hindu fold itself. It is only by annihilating the system of caste that people can become free and dignified. The Brahmins will not allow the lower classes to become Brahmins. They have closed the doors for the latter to enter into their fold. They want the system of the gradation of people for it is advantageous to them. They are in a privileged position in the system of caste. So they do not want all people to be Brahmins. They want the serving class to exist for ever. Nevertheless, both the thinkers have held that the Brahmins have to come forward to eliminate the caste system. They have urged the upper caste people to strive for the eradication of untouchability.

It may be held that Vivekananda's conception of the dignity of human person is relevant for the protection of human rights as enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights by the UNO in 1948. Although United Nation declaration of human right took place much later than Vivekananda's life, it may be held that his views on the divine dignity and equality of the human person
had the seeds of the provisions incorporated in the Human Rights Declaration. The Preamble of the declaration says that human being has an inherent dignity. Every person is entitled for equal and inalienable rights. It is the duty of everybody to recognize the inherent dignity of the person and protect his or her rights for leading a life of dignity. The Preamble also says that the members of the human family should enjoy freedom, justice and peace. Disregard for human rights has resulted in barbarous acts that have outraged the conscience of the humankind. The weak people have been subjected to tyranny and oppression by the strong ones. And there is a need to protect the rights of the oppressed in order to prevent them from taking recourse to rebellion. The thirty articles of the Declaration say that all are born free and equal in dignity, for everyone is endowed with reason and conscience. So human beings have to co-exist in a spirit of mutual respect and brotherhood. Discrimination of any kind is not to be allowed. Nobody should be subjected to slavery, untouchability or exclusion of any kind. Everyone has the right to a good standard of living and participate in the cultural life of the community. The declaration says that these rights and freedoms of the people have to be protected by the rule of the law. It is the duty of everyone to recognize and protect them.

The distinctive feature of Vivekananda’s conception of human dignity is that it seeks to protect the inalienable human
mentioned above through the spiritual transformation of the individual. It is by realizing the divinity that is inherent in oneself and in others that one can naturally protect the right to dignity and freedom of others. Spirit-to-spirit relationships can form a sound basis for treating the other with dignity and equality. Realization of the spirit transcending the distinctions of colour, sex, caste and gender enables people to relate each other with equal respect and worth. Vivekananda's concept of the real man-the divine personality—underlying the apparent man can go a long way in the protection of the dignity and freedom of the person enshrined in the Human Rights Declaration.

Vivekananda maintains that legal measures cannot ensure the culture of mutual respect and understanding among people. Laws are arbitrary and circumstantial. They are provisional and relative to the times and situations. What is ensured by the law can also be annulled by the law. What is given by the law can also be taken away by the law. Each law needs the protection by another law. The soundness and the effectiveness of the law ultimately depend upon the nature of the person who legislates and enforces them. Their success depends upon the people who follow them.

So a community of people living in freedom and dignity can be established only by the people who are spiritually enlightened. Legal measures are not sufficient for a harmonious co-existence of
people. This is evident from the fact that the events of the degradation of people have been taking place inspite of the legal and political protection. A number of cases of human rights violation are being reported every day all over the world. The people have to be awakened to the truth of inner being, namely, the divinity. It is only the recognition of the divinity inherent in everyone that can ensure the dignity and the worth of every person.

And, to conclude, it may be held that Vivekananda's conception of the dignity of the human person is relevant for the progress of India as a developed nation. India is a land of many cultures and conventions. The multicultural fabric of India is prone to several kinds of conflicts among people. And Vivekananda's spirituality of one religion cutting across all the institutionalized religions can bring about unity among the Indians. His concept of the religion of humanity based on the oneness of the spirit can put an end to the religious and communal strife that has been plaguing the growth of India. His noble idea that all human beings are the manifestation of one spirit can contribute to a peaceful co-existence of not only Indians but humanity as a whole.

India at present comprises of a large number of youth. It is reported that more than thirty per cent of Indians are in age group of around thirty years. The Indian youth have to be inspired by Vivekananda's idea that man is the maker of his destiny. His conception of man-making and character-building education has
to be imparted to the youth. The youth have to be trained in the
spirit of service to the poor and downtrodden as advocated by
Vivekananda's idea of the practical Vedanta. India can also
accomplish its dream of becoming a super power if its youth are
made to dedicate themselves more to the development of the
motherland than to their own advancement. The youth should
work for the eradication of poverty, hunger, commercialization of
education and health, criminalization of politics, religious
fundamentalism, terrorism, corruption and several other problems
faced by India at present. The youth should also be awakened to
the problem of excluding a majority of Indians from the
mainstream. India cannot grow as a developed nation unless and
until the downtrodden are given the opportunity of leading a life of
freedom and dignity founded on Vivekananda's conception of
spirituality. People of spiritual and moral integrity alone can build
an integrated and a sustainable nation and world at large.