The Socio-Political Views Of Swami Vivekananda And Its Relevance in Modern Age.

Swami Vivekananda, the remarkable personality who was not only a religious reformer but also a great social thinker of the 19th century on seeing the struggling humanity with the decline of its spiritual aspiration, emerged to dispel the darkness from the confused mind of modern India. His appearance on the world scenario was the first sign of the awakening of India from the stupor into which it had fallen before and after the British conquest, into a consciousness of its identity as a nation and its importance in the co-unity of nations.

His main effort was to redeem man from the basic animalistic tendencies and the engulfing existential problems. Giving a new profile to the ancient Vedanta, he taught the masses to apply its grand truths in all walks of life. He believed the religion formed the very backbone of life and this being the case, if religion cannot help man in all walks of life, it he felt does not remain of much use. In fact the truth is shown through everything that man is familiar with in his everyday life. All modes of worship, all modes of work, all modes of struggle are all paths of realization. It was Swami Vivekananda’s clarion call that left an indelible impression on the minds of all alike, for his words give not only direction and inspiration but also generate hope and implant deep faith in all
the trials and tribulations of life.

Swāmi Vivēkānanda derived his socio-political ideas from the Indian national life and its spiritual values. As is seen his approach to social and political problems is essentially idealistic in nature and these ideas he interpreted in terms of what can be rightly called spiritual humanism.

According to Swāmi Vivēkānanda every nation has to make a contribution of its own in a chosen field for the general advancement of humanity and when it ceases to do so it decays and dies. So also India has been having a national theme through the whole of its history, the beginnings of which are beyond the capacity of man to reckon. That theme of India’s specialization is spirituality, which means the adoption of the ways of life that lead to an immediate perception of the truth. It is to be realized that from this very country have gone forth waves of movements that have brought spiritual light and wisdom to many nations of the world, and that the moment India abandons its spiritual ideal which is the acceptance of realisation of the spiritual essence in man and the world, as the goal of human life, its national life will be threatened with imminent extinction.

Having travelled widely, Swāmi Vivēkānanda had been exposed to the different concepts of socialism all over the West and so it was not without reason that his soul brooded with infinite tenderness and anguish over India’s crippling poverty. Everywhere and at all times he saw that the poor and so called lowly had been oppressed and down trodden over the years by every
power that had come to rule them. The autocracy of priesthood, the depotism of caste, the terrible demarcations that these created within the social body, making the majority followers of Dharma the outcasts of the earth and these beyond all doubt are insurmountable barriers to the progress of the Indian nation. He thought socialism is what India needs. He said, "I am a socialist, not because it is a perfect system, but because I believe that half a loaf is better than no bread."

According to Swami Vivekananda there can be no perfect society. Society is good at a certain stage but it cannot be our ideal, for it is constant flux. Social rules and practices change from time to time, it is necessary. Therefore the motto is not 'Reform', but 'Move on'. Adaptability is the whole mystery of life, in fact it is very principle which underlines the unfoldment of life. But what should be kept in regard is that social values are not eternal values, and too much insistence on these externals to the detriment of the real and eternal spiritual principles as expounded in the Gita & Upanisads causes a baneful influence that will vitiate the life of people. Again when Swami Vivekananda exhorts us to retain our hold on our spiritual ideals, he is not asking us to relapse into the nightmare of social and religious obscurantism, but to be forward looking and go ahead without forgetting the great spiritual teachings of our Seers. No doubt the progressive spirit of the

West should be captured but more importantly without losing our moorings of the essence of spirituality. All progressiveness should be informed and directed by sensitiveness to spiritual values.

Swāmi Vivākānda was the first sanyasi who gave thought about the Indian masses. He found that the degradation of the nation is greatly due to the neglect of the masses. To quote his words, "I consider that the great national sin is the neglect of the masses and that is one of the causes of our downfall. No amount of politics would be of any avail until the masses in India are once more well educated, well fed and well cared for. They pay for our education, they build our temples, but in return they get kicks. If we want to regenerate India, we must work for them." Service to man must be regarded as service to God. He developed the idea of 'Daridrā-Nārayana' which means to see god in the poor, ignorant and the weak and help them and regenerate them as worshipping God. He says "Let each one of us pray day and night for the down trodden millions of Indians who are held fast by poverty, priest-craft and tyranny. I am no metaphysician, no philosopher, no saint. But I am poor. I love the poor, who feels the two hundred millions of men and women sunken forever in poverty and ignorance. They cannot find light and education, who will bring light to them, him I call a Mahātma, whose heart bleeds for the poor."

2. Letters of Swāmi Vivākānanda, 1989 p.264
Another cause of the moral and spiritual degradation among the people in India is mainly due to lack of faith in themselves. In order to stand up strong, united and confident, the first essential condition is faith in oneself. "The great thing is to have faith in oneself, even before faith in god." We have to give back to the nation its lost faith and individuality and raise the masses and this force to recover their faith must come from within. For unless there is faith in oneself no progress can be made. The ideal is growth, expansion and development on national lines. No doubt great things have been done in the past but there is every opportunity for greater things to be yet done. One cannot stagnate which only leads to decay and death, so we have to go forward and complete the practical realisation of the whole scheme of human progress that has already been initiated by our great ancestors.

Swami Vivekananda's staunch belief of human purity elevates the place of man in society and the universe at large. In this spiritualistic humanistic society as visualized by him there is no inconsistency between the ideal of divinity and humanity. It rests on the basic idea that "Man is the highest being that exists and that this is the greatest world. We can have no conception of God higher than man, so our God is man and man is God." Individuality in universality is the plan of creation. This shows that man is individual and at the same time

universal. So quite naturally on realising our individual nature, we begin to realise even our national and universal nature. This ideal of the divinity in human beings as preached by Swami Vivekananda inspired the people to know the fact that each soul is potentially divine and is the manifestation of God. He derived this humanism from the idea of 'Adhyatmavidya' or the science of spiritual possibilities. All human development is based upon the discovery of some or more of these possibilities lying dormant in everyone. He says, "Each soul is potentially divine and the aim is to realise this divinity."

This thought the purity of human nature, regards man as god and above all attacks all social, economic and religious evils in society, inculcating faith and strength in the individual. He said, "You can do anything and everything. You are almighty." In this manner he dehypnotised man out of his weakness and feeling of inferiority and preached the perfection of the individual through individual effort to attain the glory of the universal self. Individual perfection has its social and humanistic consequences and what Swami Vivekananda envisaged through individual perfection is social perfection and as thus the elimination of misery and turmoil.

1. Ibid Vol.VII p.300
2. Ibid p.301
Vivekananda wrote "My ideal indeed can be put into a few words and that is, to preach unto mankind their divinity and how to make it manifest in every movement of life." This only goes out to prove that all men being essentially pure and divine are free and deserve equal opportunity. This leads to the concept of universal brotherhood and equality in the world. Vivekananda revolted against the social system which permitted a few to exploit the many. He said, "Priest power and foreign conquest have trodden them down, for centuries, and at last the poor of India forgotten that they are human beings." Liberty, according to him, was the first condition for growth. It is our natural right to be allowed to use our own body, intelligence or wealth according to our will, without doing harm to others and also all members of society ought to have same opportunity for obtaining wealth, education and knowledge. He says "Just as man must have liberty to think and speak, so he must have liberty in food, in dress, in marriage and in everything so long as he does not injure others."

According to Swami Vivekananda for any great achievement three things are necessary as pre-requisites, first is to feel from the heart for through the heart comes the second required quality that is love and inspiration, for it is though selfless

love that most impossible obstacles are overcome. And thirdly the will and steadfastness to work. It is only with the power of love and the sincerity and purity of purpose that national life can be intensified and there can be any healthy progress.

He taught that one should cultivate the noble nature of doing one’s duty. By doing one’s duty gradually we get rid of the ideal of duty and then only do we feel everything as done by God. He said that duty forms the best school to learn calm submission to the will of God. Thus this duty is morality, for as one gets rid of the ideal of duty, one comes to realise that all is his and then one tends to go on forgiving, forgetting and loving all.

Swāmī Vivēkānanda’s teachings although highly spiritualistic and idealistic yet they are at the same time not radically against the material development. This he believed is necessary for the upliftment of the poor. He said,"Material civilization, nay, even luxury is necessary to create work for the poor ........ I do not believe in God, who cannot give me bread here, giving one eternal bliss in heaven. India is to be raised, the poor are to be fed, education is to be spread and the evil of priest craft is to be removed. No priestcraft, no social tyranny: More bread, more opportunity for everybody."
Although Swāmi Vivēkānanda stood for the improvement of the living conditions of people in India, yet at the same time, he warned against making material comforts and high standard of living the be all and end all of life. Material values therefore are desirable to the extent they subserve and help the development of the spiritual values and can never be ends in themselves.

Swāmi Vivēkānanda's eyes were opened to the bondage in which the whole nation was to the autocracy of the priestly caste. By himself he was not against the caste system. But he stood up against untouchability and allied social evils. He said, "I must frankly tell you that I am neither a caste-breaker nor a mere social reformer. I have nothing to do directly with your caste. You like your caste but that should be no reason why you hate another man of another caste. It is love and love alone that I preach and I base my teachings on the great Vedānta truth of the sameness and omnipresence of the soul of the universe."

Caste he further advocated was meant only for the smooth and peaceful functioning of society. But again, although he admits the usefullness of caste system, he is against the misuse and exploitation found prevalent under the system. He said "caste is the natural order. I can perform one duty in social life and you another. You can govern a country and I can mend an

1. Ibid Vol. IV p.245
old pair of shoes, but that is no reason why you are greater than I, for can you mend my shoes? Can I govern the country? I am clever in mending shoes and you are clever in reading the Vedas, but that is no reason why you should trample on my head. Hence caste system should be such that stands for mutual growth and promotes harmonious growth among all people.

The Indian scenario is governed by four castes - the Brahmans or priests, the Kshatriyas or soldiers, the Vaishyas or traders and the Sudras or labourers. Vivēkānanda called this age, the age of Sudras for it brings out mass awakening and progress. "The first three have had their day. Now it is time for the last - they must have it. None can resist it." and further advocating socialism he continues "The other systems have been tried and found wanting. Let this one be tried. A redistribution of pain and pleasure is better than always the same person having pains and pleasures."

As a socialist Śwāmi Vivēkānanda envisioned a classless society, he exalted the proletariat and advocated the elimination of privilege. "The difficulty is not that one body of men are more intelligent than another but when this body of men, because they have the advantage of intelligence should take

1. Ibid Vol.III p. 245.
away even physical enjoyments from those who do not possess this intelligence". Thus trampling on every privileges and every thing in us that work for privileges, he says that let us work for the knowledge which will bring the feeling of sameness towards all mankind.

Hence Swami Vivekananda gave to people a perennial source of patriotic inspiration scintilling with the great spiritual ideal of the nation. Revival of spirituality will always be the prelude to the revival of social and political life in India, for spirituality is the very soul of the country and its enhancement will always be the sure way to greatness and peace and its erosion the way to rational suicide. He said that before flooding India with socialistic or political ideas, first deluge the land with spiritual ideas, and with it will definitely come all that secular Knowledge and every other knowledge that is in want. Thus it is necessary that one should take the far sighted view that religious values are the highest goals of human effort, for when man takes religion as the supreme goal of life and regulates his activities accordingly he can with all ease eliminate economic conflict, racial struggle, political warfare and ethical bankruptcy. Swami Vivekananda with his powerful words injected glory and strength into the corpus of the nation and heralded a glorious awakening of the entire nation which otherwise lay steeped in ignorance, age old complacency and stupor.

SECTION - VI

EPILOGUE.