CHAPTER - VIII

CONCLUSIONS AND OBSERVATIONS
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This chapter aims at bringing together the main threads of the analysis and discussion contained in the foregoing chapters. The summary however is not a mechanical summation. The discussion here brings together the high points or main arguments, touching upon the major issues. The discussion here relates to Vivekananda (and not others like Ambedkar); the comparative analysis of the ideas of the two thinkers is taken to be over in the relative chapter. Depending on the context, an effort is made to indicate the possible areas of study, arising out of this study of the various facets of Vivekananda's ideas and activities. This of course assumes that the subject seems to be familiar but it is far from systematically or completely researched.

The first quarter of the nineteenth century is a remarkable period in the Indian history. It has dark patches as well as golden rays of hope. The political suzerainty of India was passed on to the British crown. The British had ruled the country for one and half centuries as true imperialists. Politically freedom
was lost, spiritually the soul. At this time, a great soul was born at Calcutta at 6.49 a.m. on Monday, the 12th January 1863. He was named Narendranath Datta.

His parents loved him and he was affectionate towards them. His father was a rationalist with sympathy for the poor and downtrodden. His mother was a devout Hindu woman and was much interested in the Indian epics. She taught boy Narendra ABC of the English language and the alphabets in Bengali. She was his first teacher and the home was his first school.

At the age of six, his scholastic career began and afterwards he entered high school. Soon he was recognised as a genius, with an extraordinary memory. Intellectual pursuits pleased him more than the games or sports. He was much fond of the company of books and thereby cultivated the reading habit. He turned out to be a voracious reader.

From his primary school to high school and from high school to college, it was not a regular, dull, routine promotion from one class to another or from one institution to another. He poured his heart into subjects like philosophy, psychology, literature and history and proved that his was a master's touch and his voice a master's voice from higher plane of knowledge.
For an intellectual prodigy, with philosophical bent of mind, worldly misery and unhappiness did not matter, but he did develop sympathy for the poor and downtrodden, those unfit to live but unwilling to die.

Deeply religious as he was, his inquisitive mind prompted him to search for omnipotent God. Realisation of God necessitated a three-fold approach — Jnanamarga (knowledge approach), Bhaktimarga (devotion approach) and Karmamarga (work approach). Young Narendra chose the first involving himself in thinking, meditation, reading, writing, arguments, counter-arguments, discussions, lecturing or speaking on lofty subjects. The Indian tradition prescribes a guiding role to a Guru or a master; and there is no realisation for a student unless he has the blessings of his Guru. This is well summed up in the beautiful story of Ekalavya and his Guru Dronacharya.

It was in this frame of mind that he heard about Sri Ramakrishna from his principal, of the Scottish Church College (Calcutta). The principal's advice led him to appreciate the value of deep thinking and meditation practised by Sri Ramakrishna. Young Narendra was fascinated by the mystic personality of Ramakrishna. He had been absorbed in the study of the western
philosophers like John Stuart Mill, David Hume, Charles Darwin, Herbert Spencer etc. but he was sceptical about the Indian counterparts and was not ready to believe their tenets. Even about Ramakrishna, he did not hold a high opinion in the beginning.

This was age when the Indian mystics and philosophers were groping in the dark. Generally, the public image of an Indian philosopher was that of a man obsessed with divinity. In a way, as they say, he was like a blind man looking for a black cat in a dark room which did not exist.

The outward appearance of Ramakrishna resembled that of a mystic, unattracted by the world. To a simple question of Narendra whether he had seen God, Ramakrishna's reply was a broad smile. Later on, the physical touch of Ramakrishna charged Narendra completely. He was awakened literally, so to say, with a perfect sense of discrimination between truth and falsehood, the spiritual and temporal, the free and binding. The contacts with his Guru changed Vivekananda into a mystic philosopher, a spiritualist (Vedantin), and a sympathiser with the poor. Soon he formed a colourful personality like a prism — he was a Sanyasi, a Karmayogi, a selfless worker, a great patriot, a profound thinker, a practical philosopher, a traveller, an orator — all rolled into one.
Another aspect of Vivekananda's great life is that he travelled almost through the entire length and breadth of India. This wide travel gave him an opportunity to mingle with masses to hear their tale of woe. He could see the people in the diverse forms and settings. They were to him the images of clay to be moulded into men with heart and soul working properly, in a perfect coordination. He made them conscious of their rich and hoary past when spiritualism was at its peak and ruled the country. As a true Vedantin, he asked his countrymen to revert to the Vedas, Upanisads, the epics, the inspiring works like the Bhagavadgita. For him these were rich cultural heritage, summing up the tenets of Hinduism and never the hollow words.

As in case of several great men, the Upanishads and epics had a special effect on Swami Vivekananda. The Mahabharata stood to prove that ultimately it is the truth that prevails or that good triumphs over evil. The Ramayana is a wonderful story of an ideal son and an ideal king, a householder who upholds justice and takes cognizance of the valued opinion of subjects, a feature of democracy even under monarchy -- all these can be said to form the art and craft of politics, and the essence of selfless service or duty, without caring for the reward.
Vivekananda's contribution to India's philosophical thinking and modernisation presupposes his intellectual background. History sets him on the right track, philosophy enables him to forge ahead and religion is the end point where he stops. Theorising is done under philosophy and culmination is reached in Bhakti (devotion). As in case of several seers, in case of Vivekananda too, where philosophy ends religion begins.

Swami Vivekananda's ardent appeal is to go back to the fountainhead of knowledge. His teaching is based on his own experience and it appeals directly to the heart.

Explaining the importance of Bhaktimarg (devotion approach), Vivekananda says that devotion accompanied by a thorough knowledge about God, is the foundation of one's salvation. Intense devotion soon leads to meditation and meditation in turn increases the power of devotion. The two together lead the devotee to a higher and higher level of spiritual achievement. And finally, he is led to the supreme goal of God-realisation.

Vivekananda speaks emphatically about the need to detach ourselves from this material world, as Shankaracharya implies in his famous dictum: Brahma Satyam Jagamithya (Brahman alone is reality, the world is an appearance). Vivekananda was much
influenced by Shankaracharya's tenets about man, God and the world and tried to apply these principles in the day-to-day life of a common man. While Vivekananda is against reducing the importance of this world and this very life, he does not mind goading an individual to do better in this world by an appeal to the traditional Hindu doctrine of rebirth (Punarjanma). Vivekananda points out that, yes, man's life in this world depends on his deeds in the various birth. Happy journey in this life is a testimony to our good deeds in the previous birth. Likewise a miserable life today is the result of the bad deeds in the previous life. This appeals most to the common man, caught in the web of happiness and misery, as he has a reason to console himself or account for his present lot. Such a philosophical reasoning provides a ready justification and solace to the common man in the midst of his day-to-day difficulties and hardship as well as patent inequalities of different types.

Vivekananda sees this principle of rebirth as a signal to indicate to the common people the need to lead a holy and pious life. The people are told about their account of Punya and Papa (religious merit and sin) and the need for them to enrich their account of good deeds in this life to ensure a tolerable existence in the next life. This chain of good and bad deeds is used to
discourage people from doing bad deeds and encourage them to do good ones. The chain is also recommended as one's instrument to improve one's record of the previous lives.

To Vivekananda, both religion and philosophy are important. The importance of one cannot be reduced at the expense of the other; in the Indian context both these appear fused and lean towards spiritualism.

Vivekananda however refuses to go along with thoroughgoing materialists like Charvaka. Charvaka over-emphasises the importance of this world and discounts the existence or importance of the other world. To him, man's existence is over once he is dead. Can a dead body come back to life? he asks.* Vivekananda does ask people to improve their life and living in this world; indeed, he asks them not to forget this world, but he does not agree that this is the be-all and end-all and there is nothing higher or beyond this world or that there is nothing nobler than the usual physical existence of man.

The system of English education introduced in India had its merits as well as demerits. In the narrow sense, it turned out

* The original Sanskrit question is: "Bhasmibhutasya Dehasya Punargamanam kutah" (Where is the return of the body once it is cremated)?
petty clerks and office superintendents. It enabled the British to run the empire in general and the administration in particular. However, in the wider sense, a few talented and ambitious Indians went beyond. They mastered the western philosophy, economics and political thought. These were a few masterminds who wanted to make India strong and modern.

Vivekananda and a few others studied the western philosophy. But with this background, they came back to the Indian philosophy and spiritualism. Vivekananda cherished the idea of nationhood and political freedom for the motherland through religion, philosophy and spiritualism. Gandhiji, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru and Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose, who came later and studied at English institutions, raised the banner of revolt against the English. They longed for a complete political freedom for India. Their appeal was direct and powerful.

Raja Ram Mohan Roy, who preceded Vivekananda, surrendered himself to God but never thought of fixing Him in a frame. God is omnipresent and omnipotent. So His image is uncalled for. Raja Ram Mohan Roy could trace in the western philosophy solutions for several Indian problems. Young Narendra was attracted to this majestic personality no doubt but he had several ideas of his own and so soon he parted company with the Raja.
Swami Dayananda Saraswati was the founder of the Arya Samaj philosophy. He upheld traditional Hinduism but in a modified way. "Back to the Vedas" was his trumpeter call as, according to him, the Vedanta was good for the body and soul of India. It was not to be a mere passive showpiece but was to be a little bit aggressive and imposing. National unity was uppermost in Swami Dayananda's mind and this was to be accompanied by social and religious unity. The concomitant of traditional Hinduism, the caste system, was to be relegated to the background of history. This was necessary because the caste system had created cleavages and rifts in the Indian social order with attendant problems. Maintaining distance from this system, the Indians were to follow their own customs, manners, and, in short, their own tradition, with the Vedas at the centre.

Swami Vivekananda did not accept any of these philosophies wholesale. He accepted the reformist approach of the Brahmo Samaj and the revivlilist inspiration of the Arya Samaj. But he went ahead of both these philosophies. The Upanishads were dear to his heart. For a Jnana Yogi like him, the Jnanamarga (knowledge approach) was vital. But Vivekananda had no objection to a healthy blend of both the approaches (knowledge and duty).

Vivekananda's lectures or discussions were never dull. He preached his vigorous philosophy to his countrymen and gave them
a bit of healthy caution against the western philosophy, social order, culture and even political thinking; he was against any blind or wholesale imitation. His contention is that the Vedas, Upanishads, epics are not only a rich storehouse of knowledge but are also of a great practical significance. This repository of knowledge and wisdom was left behind for us by the Rishis who thought and worked in this land thousands of years ago. Hinduism with a modern outlook was what he dreamt of. He desired the spiritual unity of India on the basis of the Vedic knowledge.

He takes individual in society as a unit and desires to develop this unit. An individual should be a rationally thinking person, ever aware and active in the social, political and religious spheres. Reason should be the guide of an individual, and he should plan and work his plans step by step, like building a house brick by brick.

At Kanyakumari the Swamiji was in raptures. This was the meeting point of several directions, north, south, east and west. It is here, at this place, that he gave a trumpet call to Indians to arise, awake and stop not till the goal was reached. It was here that he dreampt of a free India. His footprints on the beaches of Kanyakumari were to be of a great significance. It is
also here that he felt that the Indians should be open-eyed in following the active and dynamic philosophy of the west. Vivekananda longed to build a strong India by arousing a strong and constructive political consciousness. Behind this political consciousness lie the religious, philosophical and spiritual consciousness raised to a high degree. This was his vision and this provided a solid foundation for a strong and modern India.

Vivekananda was aware that building such India was a Herculean task; he advised Indians to look to the ancient lore for inspiration and guidance. He advised Indians to borrow freely but knowledgeably from other nations but he was also convinced that Indians had a lot to give to others. He wanted Indians to have respect and brotherly attitude to the others. To him, universal love and brotherhood were interchangeable words.

Vivekananda's powerful orations on the stage of the World Parliament of Religions at Chicago in September 1893 brought India a new self-confidence and this was a psychological precursor of future India's policy of independence and constructive cooperation in relation to other nations. The Swamiji made history at this conference. He expounded his views on the unity of matter and life and the need for the nations of the west and east to come together in a cooperative endeavour.
In the Vedanta system propounded by the Swamiji, the Brahman — the highest reality — is in the centre. Sat, Chit, Anand — purest existence, knowledge, bliss or happiness — constitute the highest truth which can be revealed to mankind.

It is coincidental that Vivekananda's visit to the west was very much like Sri Aurobindo's return from the west. Both were remarkable events. They no doubt attracted the attention of the west and they were also of great significance to the socio-political and religious life of India.

The essence of Vivekananda's mission was to awaken Indians and make them conscious about rights and duties, without the distinction of caste, creed and sex. This was nothing but the oneness of mankind as taught by the Vedanta. Today the connotation of the term Hinduism has changed a lot, lacking the great Swamiji's insight.

The ideals and ideas put by Vivekananda before the Indians as well as others have been positive and constructive. The merit of Vivekananda's ideas and programmes is that they are not narrowly focussed or divisive in character. Although Vivekananda has derived much inspiration from the Vedas and other sources of
the Hindu tradition, his ideas and programmes are not only good for the Hindus but also for the others. This is why Vivekananda's ideas and programmes have a universality and timelessness about them.

One may observe that Vivekananda's ideas and programmes are valid for all times. This may be seen in two ways. In one way, Vivekananda's ideas and programmes may be seen as too general and broad; therefore they are applicable everywhere and regardless of the limitations of time. He has asked the Indians and others to build strength and self-reliance. This was valid in the past and remains valid today too. But in another way, Vivekananda may be said to be less specific. Mahatma Gandhi adopted specific projects for the removal of untouchability. Vivekananda, in a way, did not have such a project-wise specificity. Vivekananda also condemned the practice of untouchability. But he (himself) did not launch any specific projects or campaigns for fighting the evil of untouchability. His missions have of course done a great deal to improve the lot of the Indians including the untouchables or other backward people. So in this sense his thinking and planning were general, philosophical and universal but not tied down to any particular projects or show-cases etc. This may be said to be a limiting feature of several other philosophers who, like
Vivekananda, were general and philosophical in their approach to the various problems of the Indian society or other societies elsewhere.

However it must be said to the credit of the strength of the ideas and the inspiration Vivekananda provided to the others that the others took up the day-to-day organisational work of improving the Indian society through specific projects. The various Ashramas and missions built by his followers in his name or in the name of Ramakrishna have been doing excellent work in India and abroad and so much of it has been going on in a quiet way. The organisational pattern resembles that of the Catholics or Protestants. But unlike the Christian missions which have at times given rise to controversies regarding their activities of conversion or receipt of foreign funds, the Vivekananda missions have been seen as welcome and benign institutions, mild and positively active, in the midst of the various communities. The Vivekananda missions have also projected a truly secular image in the sense that their doors are open to all communities and castes and subcastes. They are not suspected as centres of conversion etc.

The Swamijis and disciples of these missions usually go about with their clean-shaven heads in white clothes or saffron
clothes. This dress and way of life invests the Swamijis with an air of authority widely respected by the various sections of the Indian population. They inspire even in strangers a positive attitude and readiness for cooperation. The list of tasks or activities undertaken by the Vivekananda missions is wide-ranging and it virtually resembles the list of tasks to be performed by various government departments or units. In education, the list includes Balwadis,* primary schools, adult education, career programmes for drop-outs, non-formal education and vocational training, child adoption programme and so on. The budget head for this set of tasks is Rs. 56.75 lakh. Under the head of small-scale industry, the list includes subjects like bakery, brick-making, Agarbatti-making, cane and bamboo work, collection of forest plants and fruits for medicinal purposes, blacksmithy, agro-implements repair, carpet weaving, candle making and so on. The budget head for these activities is Rs. 1.5 lakh. These samples** tell us what a range of valuable activities are being

* A Balwadi broadly indicates a nursery school containing various categories (Bal = child; wadi = community).

Balwadis may be run under various government departments or by private institutions. Since the government earmarks specific funds for running the Balwadis, they find a usual mention in the government reports.

** For details in this regard, see Swami Chidananda, Grama Kshema (Village Welfare) : Appeal and Information Brochure (Bangalore: Ramakrishna Ashrama, 1984).
performed by the various units of the Vivekananda missions. These activities are agricultural, occupational, educational, social, cultural, literary, religious and so on. They aim at a total reconstruction of our society. The tradition of these activities and programmes is too valuable to be lost sight of. These missions are a standing testimony to the great life and philosophy of Vivekananda. There are a number of intellectuals, philosophers and social reformers who have rebuilt the Indian society from time to time in the recent centuries. Vivekananda stands very high in this glorious tradition. Ram Mohan Roy, Swami Dayananda Saraswati and Justice Ranade are some of the outstanding personalities which have contributed to the socio-cultural and political renaissance of India. Swami Vivekananda may be said to lead such a galaxy. He has been an inspirer and educator of generations and indirectly, through his followers, he has been a builder of institutions and missions which have been carrying out a wide variety of tasks and activities for the regeneration and reconstruction of the Indian society.

There is certainly a need to do a lot of study and research on the quiet constructive work being done in the various walks of life by these missions and units.
The Vivekananda missions, specially in India, are very well placed to render a valuable service to the backward millions of India. Like the Christian missions, they are not perceived as alien bodies. They also mix with the local people wherever they work, without of course getting mixed up with them or taking sides in local or factional politics. In short, they are not regarded as meddlesome or otherwise problematic. Since the Swamijis and disciples or other functionaries of these missions generally belong to the (upper) castes Hindu categories,* they are socially and politically well placed in the communities in which they work. Like the foreign missions, they do not have to be on the defensive, looking out for any problematic critics or trouble-makers.

* The observation (or assumption) that the Vivekananda missions are generally manned by the upper castes Hindus can be tested factually or statistically by undertaking specific studies. Such studies would be useful in revealing factually whether there are any significant numbers of people, from the lower castes of the Hindus or the non-Hindu communities, taking a hand in running the Vivekananda missions. Since caste compositions in politics and administration are considered important, it would be interesting and relevant to see how the different, clamouring castes figure in such vital institutions as the Vivekananda missions.
As we have noted above, the saffron-clad appearance gives the Swamijis and disciples a welcome position not only vis-a-vis the Hindu majority population but also the members of the other communities.

We may say that the workers of these missions are in a sense more suitable than the professional social workers who come to the field with degrees from the social work schools run privately or by universities, and usually drawing a monthly salary from the state or central governments or local government institutions. The Swamijis and other workers raise and manage their own finances and other resources and they are not a charge on the government or the community in which they work.

With such unique background and advantages, the missions have been rendering a high-quality service of the spiritual and secular character. The valuable work of the missions may be said to be a continuing contribution of Vivekananda's philosophy and organisational network.

One may add here that, in India's recent history, several missions and organisations have been set up; some of them continue to work with generally indifferent results, while the others are
in decline or have disappeared. The Seva Dal organisations of the Congress party and the Socialist party, specially in the pre-independence days, were wonderfully committed and active organisations. Today they are not the same. Compared to such organisations, the Vivekananda organisations rendering valuable service in rebuilding the life and working groups of the population in the various parts of the country.

This is all the more valuable when we consider the fact that several such missions or institutions are afflicted and weakened by the general climate of corruption and inefficiency. The Vivekananda missions have retained the image of purity, devotion and efficiency.*

India has entered today the era of globalisation of economics and politics. Multi-nationals of major industrial nations of the world have registered their presence here and several Indian companies are fast emerging as multi-nationals doing business in

* It would be a very good idea to carry out specific research projects comparing the working of particular Vivekananda missions and other private or public organisations in charge of a particular social service such as providing hostel facilities for students or medical service to poor people. Such studies would be useful in creating the right awareness and motivation among those organisations, private or public, to improve their record of service progressively.
other countries. In this active era of industrialisation and modernisation of even the backward nations of the world, has Vivekananda any relevance or utility? Yes. Vivekananda certainly has a great relevance. Vivekananda's strength of course has been that he is not tied down to too narrow or too local projects which tend to be outdated in a few years. Vivekananda's intellectual contribution is dynamic and yet it has an eternal quality about it. We have seen in the previous chapters that Vivekananda is first and last an individualist. In one place he has gone to the extent of saying that the individual is important and the individual and his God sum up everything, society is not so important. If there is a tie between the individual and society, the former is to be definitely preferred. This spirit of overwhelming individualism, together with the emphasis on self-help, self-reliance, hard work, devotion to duty, cast Vivekananda's philosophy and programmes into a mould of dynamic and enlightened capitalism. This is not the narrow, blind and foolishly selfish capitalism but enlightened capitalism which is aware of its strengths and weaknesses and which is aware of its inescapable obligations to society. The society becoming international in character is also perfectly in line with Vivekananda's philosophy of universalism; indeed it is in line with almost the routine creed of wider Hinduism (reflected by the Upanishads, for example). We have also seen that Vivekananda
was a champion of socialism. Now, how can Vivekananda be defended in the present context when the socialist philosophy and institutions have tottered and fallen in the various parts of the world? The answer is very simple. Vivekananda's philosophy stands strong and well defended. Vivekananda wanted socialism to restore to the individual his dignity and equality and the availability of the minimum goods and services to make decent life possible. Vivekananda was never rigid, or doctrinaire about his socialism (or any other ism) and he was never blind to the defects or weaknesses of a theory, including that of socialism. His thinking and theory-making was always experimental and dynamic (this is what he prescribed to others too). Therefore Vivekananda never went to the extent of recommending the inefficient features of socialism.* Under socialism too Vivekananda would

* Vivekananda's socialism consisted in allowing equality of opportunity, attainment of freedom for all, and changing rules and institutions which obstruct these paramount goals. "All the members of a society ought to have the same opportunity for obtaining wealth, education or knowledge. ... Freedom in all matters, i.e. advance towards Mukti, is the worthiest gain of man. ... Those social rules which stand in the way of the unfoldment of this freedom are injurious; and steps should be taken to destroy them speedily. Those institutions should be encouraged by which men advance in the path of freedom."

recommend the attributes of creativity, imagination, experimentation and the basic virtues of honesty, hard work, and the spirit of social reconstruction and humanism. It has been evident that socialism in recent times failed because its advocates and practitioners failed to pay heed to the above qualities implicit in Vivekananda's philosophy.

In a sense, Vivekananda took a position of equi-distance between capitalism and socialism inasmuch as he advised against the temptation of following any of these isms in a blind and uncritical fashion, throwing overboard the fundamental principles of human freedom, equality and happiness. To him, these principles have been basic and our socio-economic and political philosophies and systems should be constantly modified to realise the central goals of humanity. The missions and organisations which he has left behind have been doing much worthwhile work without, as he argued, getting bogged down in the dry doctrines and godless systems and procedures which tend to get outdated and sidetrack people's attention from the central goals of humanity.