CHAPTER - 1

INTRODUCTION
When the researcher took up the subject of Swami Vivekananda for his Ph.D. thesis, very soon he felt a great weight on his mind. This was because already a number of scholars had worked on the various facets of the illustrious life of the great saint. Some of these works had been Ph.D. theses. But, on the other hand, there were compensations. Firstly, the researcher had come to like the subject. He admired Vivekananda and his various ideas and optimistic philosophy. The researcher felt that the Swamiji's positive and optimistic philosophy was most suitable for the reform and progress of the diverse sections of the Indian people and, specially the backward or down-trodden people. Vivekananda advocated progressive building and use of strength for nation-building. He also emphasised integrating the diverse sections and groups of the Indian or other populations. His philosophy did not believe in alienating or throwing away any races or ethnic groups and creating enmities or hostilities in the process of nation-building or day-to-day reform. The philosophy advocated accommodation and reconciliation of the diverse sections of the various peoples.
in the world. The philosophy also advocated removal of pessimism or negative, or complaining, type of thinking or behaviour on the part of people, be they social or political workers or others. This philosophy of strength and rational and sensible use of strength specially appealed to the researcher. This is why the researcher felt that he was right and justified in choosing this mighty and apparently intimidating subject.

The other notable thing about the subject was the fact that several primary sources of data were available. Several books and texts of Vivekananda's lectures have been available thanks to the various Ramakrishna and Vivekananda Ashramas in India and abroad which have been publishing the works of Vivekananda. Besides these works of Vivekananda, there are numerous works written by the Swamijis of the missions and Maths named after Ramakrishna or Vivekananda or both jointly. There have been numerous journals and magazines published by the missions and Maths and others which regularly discuss the

* Note, for example, a recent list of periodicals published by the Vivekananda Kendra (centre) at Kanyakumari, Tamilnadu:

1. **Yuva Bharati**: "An English monthly setting a new trend in journalism for the resurgent youth."

2. **Yoga Sudha**: An English monthly elaborating the yogic way of life.

contd....
arguments and thoughts of Vivekananda on the various subjects. So the researcher was in a favourable position so far as the primary and secondary materials on the subject are concerned. The researcher was happy to study (in some detail) these various books and periodicals. Some of the select references are given in the bibliography which appears at the end. Also in the bibliography are listed the items relating to the features in the periodicals of different languages which have appeared specially in view of the centenary of Vivekananda’s Chicago addresses.

3. Viveka Vani: "A Tamil monthly news bulletin, highlighting the rural development activities of Vivekananda Kendra in Tamil Nadu."

4. Viveka Vichar: "A Marathi magazine published once in four months."

5. Vivekananda Kendra Patrika: "An English bi-annual dealing with varied aspects of India's cultural, social and spiritual heritage. Each issue is a definitive review and some of the renowned issues cover topics such as Indian Womanhood Through The Ages, Festivals In India, Temple India, Dances Of India, Music India, Indian Sports And Games, Living In Tune With Nature, Yoga – The Science of Holistic Living, Gramayan, The Wandering Monk, Concept of Dharma, etc."

6. Vivekananda Kendra Samachar: "An English and Hindi annual containing reports of the Vivekananda Kendra activities of the year."

When the researcher began to explore the various dimensions of the subject, he began to realise that the political aspects of Vivekananda's thought had not been dealt with so exhaustively and hence there was still sufficient scope to explore and research some central aspects of Vivekananda's political philosophy and message. As the table of contents will show, one chapter therefore had to be devoted to the central ideas of Vivekananda bearing on the political field. Another related chapter which had to be devised was that of the general philosophy of Vivekananda. It was felt that without such a general chapter, the chapter on political ideas would appear abrupt and unrelated. The chapter on biography can be said to be, in a sense, a proforma chapter because in a work like this such a chapter is essential and its absence could be taken as an omission. Apart from this, it may be said here that the biography chapter provides much essential information and historical and theoretical background for the next two chapters on Vivekananda's general philosophy and central political ideas.

The chapter on methodology indicates, broadly, the methods and techniques used in collecting data and forming the various chapters.

When the researcher saw so much celebration and activity going on around regarding the centenary, he felt that only book-
reading or journal consultation might not be enough and that he should also undertake some appropriate fieldwork to add a factual or practical dimension to the research work. The results of the fieldwork appear in the chapter on the account of the activities of the centenary year. Briefly, this account gives an analysis of the fieldwork and the relevant contexts of the periodicals of the relative period.

It was suggested by my guide and other professors that the researcher could attempt with advantage a fairly detailed comparison of Vivekananda's political thought with that of the other great epoch-making thinkers. It has been felt that the advocates and votaries of Vivekananda's thought have claimed his thought to be ever fresh and modern. If this is so, it is argued, then his thought should be compared with the thought of some other thinkers who have been acclaimed as social reformers or revolutionaries in the various parts of India. This suggestion had an undoubted merit. But the researcher felt that this attempt might lead to endless work and voluminous writing which might not be correct from the viewpoint of a Ph.D. thesis. Two revolutionary thinkers were suggested for such a comparative analysis: Basaveshwara and Dr. B.R. Ambedkar. The literature on both these great revolutionaries was available in an adequate volume at the Karnatak University. But the researcher felt somewhat hesitant
because he thought that the two thinkers (besides Vivekananda) were too many to accommodate in the usual size of this Ph.D. thesis. Hence, after a lot of thought and consultation, he chose for comparison only one thinker: Dr. Ambedkar. Here again it should be stated that the comparison is only a limited study and not an extended study. The researcher feared that any extension of comparison would push the other chapters of the thesis out of focus. Hence the researcher thought that only one comparison should be taken and treated at some length.

While it is not always easy to formulate very original hypotheses in social sciences, it may be said to be worthwhile in examining connections, if any, between the different phenomena or sets of circumstances in the life of a great personality like Vivekananda. In the chapter on his brief biographical particulars, we find that the righteous upbringing Vivekananda had, had a favourable impact on his future life. His father told him to be confident and not to be afraid of anyone or anything in life and this may be said to have gone some way in making Vivekananda bold and assertive in his life throughout. His mother told him stories from the epics and Puranas and this may be said to be responsible for Vivekananda's later fondness for giving references and examples from the various ancient texts and incidents. Of course in these matters, it is not so easy to establish definite or accurate
causal connections between the family and social background of a thinker and his later development and performance as a philosopher or a social reformer. We can only make broad statements pertaining to such possible relationships between two phenomena or situations. Hypothesis-building, though desirable from a social scientist's point of view, is not an easy task. Also, we can observe in case of other philosophers or social reformers, the contrary fact that the circumstances or situations in the early life (of the thinkers) were unfavourable or discouraging and yet in later life, they happen to think or perform, in their chosen field, as Vivekananda did. In other words, both such trends, of favourable or unfavourable circumstances, mark the upbringing of the various thinkers or reformers. In case of Vivekananda, we have to note that the first trend (of favourable circumstances) is visible. Some discussion and details of this trend are given in the chapter on Vivekananda's biographical particulars.

Vivekananda was one of the few thinkers of modern India who could speak, without embarrassment, about the Hindu-Muslim unity or generally the secular life of India regardless of the plurality of religions etc. Our modern-day political leaders are often given to making long speeches and raising loud slogans about the unity of India, specially at the time of elections.
To Vivekananda, such a unity or living together of the different communities, was obviously essential and desirable. Vivekananda did not see any reason why the affairs of politics and religion should not be conducted without hatred or breakdowns. He rightly believed that life and time were too precious to be wasted in the uncalled for fights between the political and religious groups or institutions. He conveyed the message of common peaceful living and working without using too much the currently used term of secularism.*

* Swamiji practised such a broad philosophy routinely in his day-to-day life. Such good relations were sanctioned by God and scriptures etc. but only our people found it difficult to accept the fact. In 1891, Vivekananda stayed as a guest with a Muslim lawyer at Mount Abu (Rajasthan). When Mr. Jagmohanlal, the private secretary of the Raja of Khetri, was surprised at this, Vivekananda made him understand the position thus: "Sir, what do you mean? I am a Sannyasin. I am above all your social conventions, I can dine even with sweepers, the so-called outcastes. I am not afraid of God, for He sanctions it; I am not afraid of scriptures, for they allow it; but I am afraid of you people and your society. You know nothing of God and the scriptures: I see Brahman everywhere, manifested even in the meanest creature. For me, there is nothing high or low. Shiva, Shiva!"

Vivekananda came down heavily on the conservative supporters of the caste system and priesthood. He looked upon the caste categories as a matter of specializing, once upon a time, in the different skills, trades and occupations. He openly condemned those who did not move with the times and perform the changing functions needed by the new societies in the different regions. He asked people to be forward-looking and give up the fuss over the imaginary business of pollution and distance between the different castes and communities. Religion or caste, to him, did not consist in the particular activities in the kitchen or the right hand (or left) in which we should hold a glass of water.

According to Vivekananda, discrimination on caste basis practised for centuries by the upper castes was patently untenable and unjustified. It was irrational and baseless. It had no sanction in the Vedas or the genuine sources of the Hindu religion. To him, therefore untouchability was unethical and led to social and political inefficiency. He also advised the priests to be rational and compassionate and move with the times. He believed that the backward-looking and rigid priests contributed to the complications and evils of the Indian society.

All such ideas and comments briefly stated above figure in various places in the chapters on Vivekananda's philosophy.
in general and the central political ideas. They are also touched upon, depending on the context, in the chapter on the comparative analysis of Vivekananda and Ambedkar's ideas and contributions.

The analysis in the various chapters here will indicate the emphatic and positive way in which Vivekananda understands and advocates ideas and principles of the various Vedas, epics, Puranas, and Shastras. Vivekananda indicates that nothing in the religious texts or the wider intellectual heritage of the Hindus warrants backwardness or anti-intellectualism. These various sources lay upon us the obligation to think rationally and act positively and courageously. The analyses and discussions in the chapters that follow hereafter contain in places such positive statements and interpretations of Vivekananda on the past heritage of, and the future projects for, India. These various aspects will be further clear from the following scheme of chapters.

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