CONCLUSION

In any part of the world, at any point of time, a new social philosophy emerges as a product of reflective thinking of social thinkers to bring about qualitative improvement in social life. In India, social philosophy touches both the metaphysical and social dimensions of human life. The history of India speaks about how the ancient Indian seers had developed their social thoughts by delving deep into the social life of the people, upholding this eternal value system for spiritual as well as social progress of the country.

As distinct from the culture and civilization of the rest of the world, the history of India reveals the fact that Indian society, from the very beginning of its civilization, considered women as custodians of the spiritual tradition, culture and value system of society. Society had given woman a respectable position and had demarcated her role from that of man in the multi-level network of relationships within society, especially in the two major social institutions of marriage and family. As far as Indian society is concerned, women were regarded as unavoidable factors in the overall functioning, growth and development of society.

All the above factors amply show that it is not possible for any social thinker in India to contribute his share in the field of social philosophy by neglecting its women who act as an indispensable link and foundation for the overall growth of the nation. Hence the social thinkers at any period of time in the
History of India used to make efforts to undergo an exhaustive and analytical study on the social status and position of women down the ages, their constraints in leading a social life, their personal as well as social needs at various stages in their life, etc, while formulating their social theories.

History of India shows that women in India had enjoyed a high social status in the early Vedic age. But, her status and position in the society had deteriorated in the later period. The deterioration of women’s social status and freedom had its origin first in the field of education that gradually spread to institutions of marriage and family. This deterioration ultimately affected the social order, disturbing the social equilibrium during the medieval and modern periods.

Historians believe that the ill effects of the patriarchal system prevailed in India during the post-Vedic period and the restrictions imposed by the law-givers upon women members as a security measure in the context of foreign invasions were major factors leading to deterioration of their social status, curtailing of freedom and independence in the later period.

Many social thinkers in the modern Indian had realised the grave need for emancipation of Indian women for the material as well as spiritual development of India. Their efforts to improve the social status of women in Indian society had paved the way for development of women’s movement and the formation of women’s associations upholding the nation’s age-old
value systems, spiritual tradition and cultural heritage during 18th and 19th century. The activities of these associations were not only limited to improving the social status of women but also to improving their legal status through imparting legal security. This had helped women to contribute their share in various fields of social activities and to express themselves in their personal as well as social life.

The later history of India reveals the changes that occurred in the feminist ideology in the country. Most of the modern feminist thinkers directed their thoughts with the false notion that the nation’s old spiritual tradition, value system and culture will surely arrest the freedom and independence of modern women in India. Blindly accepting the western feminist ideology, they began to follow the footsteps of the Western feminists who had concentrated their work on establishing female power over male authority in the personal as well as social life of women.

The influence of western feminist ideology had also altered the lifestyle and moral concepts of modern Indian women, especially those who were from the upper and middle strata in the urban areas. Upholding the western mode of life, they tend to cultivate a rebellious attitude towards the conventional feminine ideology which was followed by Indian women down the ages. This, in turn, paved the way for the modern Indian women to lose their
values, individuality, moral and cultural identity rooted in spiritualism, making them fit for the consumerist culture guided by materialistic values.

Though the newly emerging trend of modernization has given economic, social, political and intellectual freedom and independence of society, it has brought about a negative impact on the institutions like family and marriage and also arrested the spiritual freedom of women in Indian society. At the same time, the social, economic and intellectual status of women who belong to the lower strata of society underwent deterioration in the modern age and they became the victims of poverty and exploitation. The lack of social awareness and ignorance had kept them away from their social responsibility for moulding a better future generation, denying them intellectual and spiritual freedom.

**RELEVANCE OF SWAMI VIVEKANANDA’S IDEAL OF WOMANHOOD**

Vivekananda was the first among the Indian saints who had raised his voice on behalf of the women members of society. He always stood for the promotion of material as well as spiritual emancipation of women through education. His educational philosophy and the ideal scheme of education was a milestone in the physical, moral and spiritual growth of modern women in India. It also helped them to broaden their views, coming out of the cocoons constructed around them by the society and making them fit enough to enjoy social, intellectual as well as spiritual freedom. He strongly
recommended the modern social reformers to work for enhancing the physical, intellectual and spiritual abilities of the womenfolk. He further called upon the social reformers to strive for making them spiritually perfect and to preserve the country’s spiritual and cultural tradition.

Vivekananda never forgot to apply his Neo-Vedantic ideology in his feministic thoughts. By upholding the Vedantic ideal of ‘Unity of Existence’, he had directed his countrymen to do their best for the manifestation of ‘Spiritual Oneness’ while leading a social life. He asked both men and women to work together for the spiritual regeneration of the nation, upholding mutual respect, love and regard.

He believed that the distinctive role woman has to play in society is to realise and manifest her Motherhood, not in the biological but spiritual sense. This has been realised in Sri Sarada Devi’s personality. Sri Sarada Devi herself had declared that Sri Ramakrishna had left her behind to reveal the Motherhood of God. Sri Sarada Math and Mission which is an organisation of renunciates and lay women upholds this ideal and serves society at various levels.

**INDIAN THEORY OF FEMINISM**

It is high time the feminist thinkers made a historical analysis on various problems facing women in India and evolve an Indian theory of Feminism, upholding the native culture and tradition and keeping the undesirable
elements of Western feminism at bay. It is also the responsibility of the feminist thinkers to make a concerted effort to awaken Indian women spiritually, morally and intellectually through the medium of education and help them to grow in harmony with the culture and tradition of the nation. Proper guidance and opportunities should be provided to them to undertake their social responsibilities more effectively in mutual co-operation with the male members of society.

Historical analysis and a critical study of the ancient Indian literature will create an awareness among the Indian feminist thinkers on the tradition, culture and value system of the country and also about the status, position, needs and material as well as spiritual aspirations of the Indian women down to the ages. This would help them in a big way in making the young generation properly understand of the Indian ideal of womanhood and motherhood in its true form, making them spiritually enlightened mothers and inspirers of the future generation.

India needs its own theory of Feminism with practical relevance which should emerge as a humanistic movement, facilitating a progressive and conservative approach towards the needs of women by satisfying their material as well as spiritual aspirations in tune with the country’s value system, culture and tradition. Any attempt to construct an Indian theory of feminism ignoring its cultural, socio-religious and spiritual tradition would
only arrest the personal and social progress of its women generation. Swami Vivekananda’s ideal of womanhood within the framework of his social philosophy will surely serve as a guideline for the country’s feminist thinkers to formulate an Indian theory of feminism that stands apart from all the modern feminism which is nothing but a reckless imitation of the West.

In the previous chapters we have been trying to delineate the idea of womanhood projected in the speeches and writings of Swami Vivekananda and its relevance in the context of women’s liberation movements in our country. A man’s philosophy emanates from his life’s experiences and in the first chapter we made a brief survey of the Swami’s life and mission. He was essentially a spiritual seeker, the sole aim of his life being the realization of God. In Indian tradition the goal of religion is not salvation or atonement of sin, but freedom from human limitations, freedom from birth and death, Moksha, which in common parlance is called the realization of God. The Swami verified in his own life the truth of God and the individual Self. In his speeches and writings he gave a wide meaning to Moksha in keeping with modern thought of translating it as “freedom”. Freedom, freedom is the song of the soul, said he. So he was in full sympathy with all movements for the liberation of man. “Liberty is the first condition of growth. Your ancestors gave every liberty to the soul, and religion grew. They put the body under every bondage, and society did not grow. The opposite is the case in the west- every liberty to society, none to religion. Now are falling
off the shackles from the feet of Eastern society as from those of western religion….”. ¹

Chapter two dealt with the social philosophy implied in the usages and customs of Hindu society with all its vagaries and the social ideals depicted in the much maligned Smritis. One fact stands out in the culture and tradition of society over the ages and the scriptures that Hindu civilization had given equal attention to molding the character and conduct of the individual in such a way that he fulfills his social functions and at the same time grows spiritually and finds individual fulfillment.

In chapter three Swami Vivekananda’s social philosophy has been discussed. The Swami lived during a period of unprecedented reformatory zeal. Some social evils like suttee had already been stopped by law. The reformers were now vociferously championing the cause of abolition of child marriage, raising the minimum age of marriage, widow remarriage, education for women, abolition of caste, etc. The reformers, most of whom had imbibed the liberal ideas of the West through the university education were keen to reshape social institution to satisfy Western norms. He believed that the major defect in the work of the reformers was that it went against the grain of our culture. Each nation has an ideal and India’s is religion. In their zeal for reform they were destroying Religion also. This was like throwing away the baby along with the bath water. I claim that no
destruction of religion is necessary to improve the Hindu society, and that this state of society exists not on account of religion but religion has not been applied to society as it should have been.” By religion the Swami did not mean religion that goes by a denominational name, or named after a prophet or an ethnic religion, but the religion that is inalienably inherent in the very constitution of man which he defined as ‘the manifestation of divinity already in man’. All religions of the past present and future were all various attempts by humanity to express its true nature which is divinity. He also believed that education makes man perfect so as to realize his Divinity. So his panacea for India’s regeneration was education with spiritual and religious, the latter complementing and reinstating the secular teaching of Enlightenment and the Age of Reason that man is his own Master and maker of destiny.

In Chapter four and five the traditional concept of woman implied by scriptures and in real life was discussed and compared with swami Vivekananda’s ideas. In the case of the uplift of woman also he advocated education and freedom for women so that women themselves will be able to solve their problems. This was his nostrum for raising the masses also. There were some general principles which he used to reiterate. No one should imitate another. One tends to judge another by his own standards, so does a notion judge another nation. The Swami insisted that each nation has to decide upon what is best for it. Women and masses should be furnished
with the necessary intellectual and material wherewithal and they will uplift themselves.

In Chapter six, some of the aberrations of modern feminist movement vis-à-vis India were pointed out. It underlines the wisdom of Swami Vivekananda when he pointed out that a coycat reformation can only further compound the existing problems. To be equal to man woman need not metamorphose herself into man.

The contemporary reformers had always western model before them and they conceived the new woman after the ideal of the wife. “It is unfair to judge women by in the east by the western standard. In the west woman is the wife; in the east she is the mother.” “In India the woman was the visible manifestation of God and her whole life was given up to the thought that she was a mother…”

The last chapter highlights the social relevance of constructing an Indian theory of feminism based on the Indian ideal of womanhood. This should emerge as a humanistic movement, facilitating a progressive and conservative approach towards the needs of women by satisfying their material as well as spiritual aspirations in tune with the country’s value system, culture and tradition. It also cautioned against making any attempt to construct an Indian theory of feminism ignoring its cultural, socio-religious and spiritual tradition which would arrest the personal and social progress of
its women generation. The study also suggests some practical suggestions based on Swami Vivekananda’s ideal of womanhood within the framework of his social philosophy with the hope that it will surely serve as a guideline for the country’s feminist thinkers to formulate an Indian theory of feminism that stands apart from the modern feminism which is nothing but a reckless imitation of the West.

REFERENCES

1. C. W., Vol, V, pp. 47-48
2. Ibid.
3. C. W., Vol, III, pp. 505-506