CHAPTER - 7
VIVEKANANDA PHILOSOPHY OF SOCIAL REFORM - ITS RELEVENCE IN MODERN TIMES

Vivekananda believed in non-dualist philosophy of Vedanta, the goal according to his philosophy is to realize the truth that ‘I am HE [GOD]’. The most striking note of Vivekananda's philosophy is carrying out of Advaita Vedanta system into practice. He emphasized on taking the sinking millions of India by hand, he preached the practical Vedanta to everyone, so that religion may withstand the shock of modern science. In his life and message is found a happy union of the ethical idealism of Buddha and spiritual idealism of Shankara. The literal meaning of philosophy is love of wisdom, the word philosophy refers to a certain way of thinking. It arises out of an attempt to arrive at a solution of a problem, thus it is a logical enquiry into the nature of reality. All purposive human action are guided and directed by a philosophy of life. Swami Vivekananda was endowed with a rich philosophy of life, which was based on a clear, deep and far-reaching vision of the nineteenth century national scenario, much beyond the ken of his contemporaries.

VIVEKANANDA PHILOSOPHY OF SOCIAL REFORM

Vivekananda was a unique reformer. He said that he did not believe in reform, but he believed in growth, expansion, development on national lines. Vivekananda felt that the reform must go down to the basis of things to the very root of the matter. That is what he called radical reform. Instead of frittering away the energies on social reforms, they should educate the people so that people may be able to solve their own problems. Vivekananda emphasized that until that is done, all ideal reforms are to be remained ideals only.
Vivekananda believed that no system can have strong and enduring foundation unless it is built on spirituality. His statement that,

"I am a socialist, not because I think that it is a perfect system, but half a loaf is better than no bread."

Is often misunderstood. When he spoke about socialism, he did not think of socialism on the material plan as in the West. He wanted the society to have moral and spiritual regeneration. He believed that economic reform alone can not bring about socialism so he gave the gospel of equality and the gospel of social raising up. Uplift of the masses and uplift of women will be the real content of equality. Formerly chief justice of Calcutta High Court said that

"Vivekananda was the first amongst us who was convinced that the key to all the problems of India and that of the world, of all its disharmony and discord lies in socialist order tempered with spiritual thought. Following Vivekananda's teachings we have also, in our National Charter resolved to constitute India into a Socialist Republic."

Vivekananda said not to have word of condemnation, even for the most superstitious and the most irrational of Indian institutions, for they also must have served some good purpose in the past. He proclaimed that his deal is not reform, but growth, expansion. He urged to take man where he stands and from there give him a lift. He was sorry to see that most of modern reform movements were imitating Western methods, holding religion responsible for degeneration. So the result was failure.

He pointed out that the need of the time was to make the people educated to make them understand their needs and ready to solve their problems. In his words

"The new order of things is the salvation of the people by the people."

To delve deep into his philosophy, it is classified under four broad categories—political philosophy, educational philosophy, religious philosophy, social philosophy.
VIVEKANANDA’S POLITICAL REFORM
ITS RELIVENCE IN MODERN TIMES.

According to Vivekananda, each nation has its own peculiar method of work. Some work through politics, some through social reform, some through other lines. But religion is the only ground, along which India can move.

"For that is the theme, the rest are the variations in the national life—music."

So he felt that religion must be maintained in India. Leave that point untouched and do whatever you like, the Hindu is quite unconcerned and keeps silence.

But if you run foul of him there, beware you court your ruin.

TYRANNY PREVAILING UNDER THE POLITICAL SYSTEM OF THE WEST

When the Europeans were involved in self-boasting, making Indians feel inferior; Vivekananda asked Indians not to be startled with the political system of the West. There under the guise of the politicians the devil danced in man; subjects were sent to fight on foreign lands and the treasures of the politicians were piled up with gold. They make money by sucking the very life-blood of the masses. To quote Vivekananda.

"The Western World is governed by a handful of Shylocks. All those things that you hear about—constitutional government, freedom liberty, and parliaments are but jokes."

SOCIALISM; NOT A PERFECT SYSTEM

Vivekananda was of the view that the advantages of Socialism were the distribution of physical comforts and the great distribution of ordinary education. But people under socialism were guided as lifeless machines, with no vibration of life, no stir of inventive genius, no desire for novelty. On top of everything, he objected to the over—
emphasis of Socialism on economic reform alone. Vivekananda wanted to emphasize the spiritual and moral values also.

**STRESS ON WIDE NATIONAL CONSCIOUSNESS**

He called upon the people to have faith in their strength, reverence for ancient Indian heritage, struggle against social oppression and superstitions and accept new and scientific ideas. In the nineteenth century, when every educated Indian was thinking government services to be very prestigious and hunted for it, he gave the call for self-dependence, thundering thus

"People of foreign countries import Indian raw goods, manufacture various commodities by bringing their intelligence to bear upon them, and become great; whereas you have locked up your intelligence, thrown away your inherited wealth to others and roam about crying piteously for food."

Thus he could clearly comprehend the economic basis of British imperialism, which many of his contemporaries could not understand. He was also well aware of the British policy of 'Divide and rule', so he exhorted his countrymen to cross all the barriers of caste, religion, province, class and join their hands as Indians. At the time when British rulers were trying to disturb the unity between Hindus and Muslims, Vivekananda proclaimed.

"For our own motherland a junction of the two great systems, Hinduism and Islam Vedanta brain and Islam body is the only hope."

He had fully analysed Indian History, that shows religious movement always preceding national regeneration. So he made the successful attempt for awaking national consciousness on the basis of spiritual consciousness and become the undisputed spiritual father of the Indian freedom movement. Moreover, he urged the Indians to get beyond the narrow nationalism and judge all the problems with an international perspective.
OBSESSION TO THE MEDICANT POLICY OF THE CONGRESS

The then Nationalists were feeling themselves to be intellectually superior to the common people so they did not mix with them. Vivekananda objected to it and urged to go to the lowliest of the lowly, share their sufferings, serve them as God and sacrifice their all for the country. The Congress gradually accepted all his programmes.

PROPAGATING A NATIONAL AMBITION

No nation can progress without a national ambition. So he gave Indians a new ambition that.

"The good things are to be retained, but the India that is to be, the future India, must be much greater than ancient India."¹⁰

He boldly declared that, "This time the centre is India," and said.

"We have to conquer the world. That we have to India must conquer the world and nothing less than that is my ideal."¹⁰

He said that by combining spirituality and material prosperity India would emerge as a new, modern and greater India.

VIVEKANANDA’S EDUCATIONAL REFORM ITS RELIVENCE IN MODERN TIMES

During the middle of the Nineteenth Century, the introduction of the English education turned the educational institutions into centers of examination. Book learning became the motto of students. Vivekananda objected to it and said that

"Real education is that which enables one to stand one's own legs. The education that you are receiving now in schools and colleges is only making you a race of dyspeptics."¹¹

He gave the education its true meaning by saying that
Education is the manifestation of the perfection already in man.

All the knowledge that the world has ever received comes from the mind. The external world only provides opportunity to man to see his own mind. For example, it is said that Newton discovered gravitation. Vivekananda explained it as—the falling of an apple gave the suggestion to Newton and he studied his own mind. He rearranged all the previous links of thoughts in his mind and discovered a new link among them, which is called the law of gravitation. To quote Vivekananda:

'Like fire in the piece of flint, knowledge exists in the mind; suggestion is the friction which brings it out.'

EDUCATION AS THE PROCESS OF ASSIMILATION OF IDEAS

Vivekananda was dissatisfied with the prevalent educational system, as it emphasized only on providing information. He said that—

'Education is not the amount of information that is put in to your brain and runs riot there, undigested, all your life.'

Only that type of education can meet the end of character-formation and man making which is assimilated. And only that type of education is assimilated which is according to the nature of the concerned child's Country or Society. According to Vivekananda, a person roting the thoughts of others in foreign language, stuffing the brain with them, holding some university degrees can not be considered educated. He asked that

"Is that education, as a result of which the will, being continuously choked by force through generations, is well-nigh killed out; is that education under whose sway even the old ideas, let alone the new ones, are disappearing one by one, is that education which is slowly making man a machine."

He emphasized that education making a man a clerk or lawyer or at the most a Deputy Magistrate, which is another form of clerkship, can not do anything good for the Country at large. Educated person must be sensitive enough to pay heed to the piteous cry
rising from the land of Bharata and must be able to fulfill its want. Education should bring out the strength of character, fill the spirit philanthropy and the courage of a lion. To get this goal education should be free from foreign control. An educational system suiting to the needs of the Country should be developed.

In the words of Vivekananda

"It is a man-making religion that we want. It is man-making theories that we want. It is man-making education all round that we want."

VIVEKANANDA RELIGIOUS PHILOSOPHY OF SOCIAL REFORM—ITS RELIVENCE IN MODERN TIMES

Vivekananda’s religious philosophy is penetrated here under the following headings.

FAITH IN THE NON-DUALIST PHILOSOPHY OF VEDANTA

Vivekananda believed in non-dualist philosophy of Vedanta. The non-dualists believe that as the one sun, reflected on various piece of water, appears to be many and million of globules of water reflect so many millions of suns yet there is only one sun; so are many jivas but reflection of different minds. These different minds are like so many different globules, reflecting the one being. God is being reflected in all these different jivas. The goal according to this philosophy is to realize the truth that “I am the ultimate reality, the Brahma” and thus attain freedom.

The discovery of the self beyond the body and the mind which is immortal, free and blissful in nature; is the special contribution of Vedanta to the philosophical thought of the world. This was why Vivekananda taught Vedanta everywhere. He widened the traditional horizon of religion and pointed out

“Vedanta formulates, not a universal brotherhood but universal oneness.”
PROCLAMATION OF THE GREATNESS OF INDIAN RELIGIOUS THOUGHT

During the Nineteenth Century, Englishmen were trying to make Indians feel the inferiority of Indian religion to Christian religion. Consequently some educated youth developed a revulsion against Hindu religion. But Vivekananda stood at the World's Parliament of Religions, challenging the Christian world to prove its superiority. He declared that, "Unity in variety is the plan of nature and the Hindu has recognized it.

Giving Christians a little criticism he said that

"You Christians, who are so fond of sending out missionaries to save the soul of the heathen why do you not try to save their bodies from starvation"  

He felt Advaitism to be the only position from which all religions and sects can be looked upon with love and said that

"the Hindus may get the credit of arriving at it earlier than other races."  

He further added that Hindu religion is the universal religion because - From the high spiritual flights of the Vedanta philosophy, of which the latest discovery of science seem like echoes, to the low ideas of idolatry, with its multifarious mythology, the agnosticism of the Buddhists and the atheism of the Jains each and all have a place in the Hindus religion."  

Thus he successfully argued that why Hindu religion is truer than any other religion,

"because it never conquered, because it never shed blood, because its mouth always shed on all, words of blessing, of peace, words of love and sympathy."

though he asserted the greatness of Hindu religion before the West, but he always emphasized the oneness of the heart of all religions. He asked Christians to be a true Christian, a Muslim to be a true Muslim and a Hindu to be a true Hindu.
EMPHASIS ON RENUNCIATION, MEDITATION AND SERVICE OF HUMANITY

According to Vivekananda, four yogas—karma-Yoga, Bhakti-Yoga, Jnana-Yoga, and Raja-Yoga can lead to self-realization. Renunciation is the turning point in all the Yogas. The Karmi renounces the fruits of his work. The Bhakta renounces all the worldly loves for the almighty and omnipresent love. The Rajayogi renounces the attachment with worldly pleasure and controls his mind. The Janana renounces every thing because his philosophy is that nature never existed, neither in the past, nor present, nor will be in the future.

For Yoga meditation is also essential. Meditation is the concentration of mind. The concentrated mind is a lamp that shows every corner of the soul.

Vivekananda emphasized most on seeing Shiva in the poor, in the weak and in the diseased and serving them. He once said

"I am no metaphysician, no philosopher, nay, no saint. But I am poor, I love the poor."

He wished to be born again and again and suffer thousands of miseries so that he may worship his God the wicked, the miserable, the poor.

CARVING OUT ADVAITA VEDANTA SYSTEM IN TO PRACTICE

The most striking notes of Vivekananda's Philosophy is carrying out the Advaita Vedanta System in to practice. One may talk of many doctrines, may devote years to many scriptures, may listen to many systems, but it can bring no fruit, unless one does has not have the heart to feel. So Vivekananda wanted that one must feel everything as part of one's own bodys. The saint, the sinner, the poor and the rich are all parts of one infinite whole Brahman. He emphasized on taking the sinking millions of India by hand, teaching the practical Vedanta to everyone, so that religion may withstand the shock of Modern science. Expressing his thoughts on Practical Vedanta he emphasized
"Do you not remember what the Bible says ‘If you cannot love your brother, whom you have seen how can you love God, whom you have not seen? I shall call you religious from the day you will begin to see God in men and women.’

The idea upheld by Vivekananda is to struggle to lesion the misery of the world or die in the attempt.

DEVELOPING NEO-VEDANTISM

Overall Vivekananda’s Religious Philosophy is Neo Vedantic. There is one significant point of distinction between the Neo-Vedanta of Vivekananda and Classical Vedanta of Shankara. Both are of the view that a person can realize Brahman and attain liberation while dwelling in his body and living in the world as a free soul until the term of life, due to Karma, expires. But Shankara has emphasized the ideal of liberation, the attainment of supreme bliss in complete absorption in Brahman, whereas Vivekananda has emphasized the ideal of living in the world as a free soul for the well-being of humanity.

By emphasizing the ideal of service to mankind in the spiritual life, before and after the attainment of illumination, Vivekananda has linked Vedantism and Buddhism. Thus in the midst of cross currents of conflicting ideas, Vivekananda’s Philosophy provided a definite direction to the search for identity. He tried to bring all religions together in the golden bond of understanding and love. He went beyond his contemporaries in proving that all religions were not partly but wholly true. This was synthesis and not mere eclecticism or syncretism; this amounted to not mere toleration of other religions but accepted of them.

VIVEKANANDA’S SOCIAL REFORM ITS RELIVENCE IN MODERN TIMES

To make a deep plunge in to his social philosophy, it is sub-divided as under-Right from the Vedic Period, arms, money and labour have been the basic forces of the society. These constitute the basic structure while ecology, tools etc. are secondary.
Vivekananda pointed out that Brahmin with the support of knowledge, Kshatriya having the power of arms and vaishya on the basis of money, assert their superiority. In this struggle of excelling others the labour class is always crushed. So Vivekananda showed his greatest concern with the lower class because

“It is they who from time immemorial have been working silently, without even getting the remuneration of their labours! Ye labouring classes of India, as a result of your silent, constant labours Babylon, Persia, Alexandria, Greece, Rome, Venice, Genoa, Baghdad, Samarquand, Spain, Portugal, France, Denmark, Holland and England have successively attained supremacy and eminence!”

IMPLICATIONS OF PROGRESSIVE CHANGE IN SOCIETY

According to Vivekananda, accumulation of power is as necessary as diffusion, or rather more so. The accumulation of blood in the heart is an indispensable condition for life; its non-circulation throughout the body means death. The chief cause of India’s degeneration has been the monopolizing of the whole education by a handful of men. Moreover he pointed

The Greek sought political liberty. The Hindu has always sought spiritual liberty. Both are one-sided to care only for spiritual liberty and not for social liberty is a defect, but the opposite is still a greater defect. Liberty of both soul and body is to be striven for.”

Swami ji says that if we want the progressive changes in society people have to be intensely practical as well as they have to acquire deep spiritual knowledge.
REFERENCES


