CHAPTER - III
HIS PHILOSOPHY OF LIFE

Vivekananda's philosophy of life arises from the awareness of the social, religious and economic conditions of the Indian masses. He had also a realization that at least some of the social evils were due to the orthodoxy and superstitions prevalent in the society of the time. He had a deep conviction that this was due to a loss of faith in spiritual values. Consequently, he aimed at emphasizing the ultimacy of spiritual values.

The deepest influence upon his thought is obviously of ancient Hindu philosophy—especially of the Vedanta. It can safely be said that to a very great extent, Vivekananda is a Vedantist. The main body of his thought is derived from the Hindu scriptures—from the Upanishads and the Vedas. His basic belief in the essential unity of everything, that is, in the completely monistic nature of reality, owes its origin to the Vedanta. His doctrine of Maya, again, is derived from the same source. The distinction between 'an empirical point of
view' and 'a transcendental point of view' that he so often makes and to which he refers time and again in order to solve certain apparent contradictions of his thought, is also borrowed from the Vedanta. It is true that Vivekananda always emphasizes the need of re-interpreting Vedanta in accordance with the demands and needs of the time; In fact, his philosophy itself is an attempt in that direction, but this remains a fact that some of the basic ideas of the philosophy of Vivekananda are derived from ancient Hindu philosophy-specially the Vedanta.

In a certain sense, Vivekananda is influenced by Buddhist philosophy also. Buddha himself, even after attaining Nirvana, kept on roaming about and helping others in their struggles against suffering. Vivekananda fully recognizes the worth of such humanitarian and altruistic work. His own missionary zeal for service is influenced by this. Some of the Buddhistic ideals, like Samyak karmanta and Ajlva have also inspired Vivekananda a great deal.

Alongwith these Indian influences, he also carried, on his thought, the influence of Christianity. He was impressed by the strength of character, the soul-force that the man of the Cross
possessed. He could see that it required a supreme spiritual strength to forgive the oppressor. From Christianity, therefore, Vivekananda takes up the idea of service and love. His conviction that man contains within him the spark of Divinity and his optimistic belief in the possibility of man's redemption contain elements that greatly resemble the Christian notion of the kingdom of God.

There were certain other influences too. For some time he was under the influence of Brahmo Samaj, and it can be said that his strong feelings against the prevalent orthodox and superstitious rites were generated under that influence. Dayananda's emphasis on the indeterminate nature of reality and his practical insistence on the quality of fearlessness had left a deep mark on Vivekananda. Then, there was the *Gita*, which with its emphasis on 'selfless work', was a source of constant inspiration to Vivekananda.

But the profoundest influence, in the light of which every other influence was remodelled and shaped, was that of his master – Swami Ramakrishna Paramahansa. In fact, the story of the life of Vivekananda would have been entirely different, had he not come under the influence of Ramakrishna. It is said that Ramakrishna brought about a spiritual transformation in the personality and the
mental make-up of Vivekananda. Swami Nikhilananda, speaking about this, says:

It was his Master who had taught him the divinity of the soul, the non-duality of God, the unity of existence and one more great thing, that is, the universality or harmony of all different religions. (53)

It is true that Ramakrishna initiated him into spiritual discipline and meditation.

The philosophy of Vivekananda is idealist in more senses than one. Idealism may mean either Ideal-ism, or Idea-ism or Idealism as such. There is a difference between the second and the third senses of the term although both can be example of Metaphysical Idealism. Metaphysical Idealism believes that the reality is ultimately spiritual or mental or ideal in character. Some Metaphysical idealists go on to hold that the ideal reality is of the nature of ‘Ideas’ finite or Infinite or Ideas objective and universal. Vivekananda is an idealist because he believes that the ultimate reality is essentially spiritual in character. He is also an idealist in the sense that he believes in the ultimacy of certain ideal values and recommends that a continuous and persistent effort should be made for the attainment of those
values. His 'ideal-ism' is therefore not unrealistic; Ideal-ism becomes unrealistic only when the ideal is nothing but a creation of one's imagination. Vivekananda asserts that the ideal that he talks about is a living ideal capable of inspiring and attracting man towards itself.

Vivekananda's idealism is monistic. An idealistic philosophy that is strictly monistic becomes abstract and comes to assert that reality has to be indeterminate. The One, it feels, cannot accept any distinction or qualification of any kind within it. Vivekananda very often describes reality in this fashion-in the fashion of the abstract monist. But, at many other places, reality is given a monotheistic description and assertions about God's characters are emphatically made. Now, one is at a loss to decide whether Vivekananda's philosophy is strictly and abstractly monistic or monotheistic.

In fact, Vivekananda combines, in his thought, Abstract Monism and Theism. He is a Pantheist, and yet God, according to him, is personal. Consequently, we find two currents flowing almost side by side in the philosophy of Vivekananda one that resembles Advaita Vedanta, and the other that reminds one of the theism of the Bhakti-cult. Vivekananda is almost convinced that these two
currents are not really two currents, that they are just two ways of looking at the Reality. But then, an attempt can be made to determine the features of both these aspects of his thought. Almost like an Advaitin, Vivekananda says that reality is one absolute Brahman. He emphasizes the monistic character of reality to such a great extent that he says that reality is one but not a ‘whole’. According to Vivekananda, Absolute is perfect unity, and therefore the distinction between whole and parts completely vanishes. The concept of Absolute is arrived at by carrying the process of abstraction to its maximum possible limit, and that explains its strictly monistic character:

... God is neither outside nature nor inside nature, but God and nature and soul and universe are all convertible terms. You never see two things: it is your metaphorical words that have deluded you. (*Works* III:214)

That is why the absolute has been described as indeterminate. You cannot properly attribute qualities to the Absolute. To attribute characters to the Absolute would amount to knowing the absolute and ‘knowing the Absolute’ is nothing but a contradiction-in-terms.
Absolute is the unknowable, it does not admit even internal divisions.

Like Sankara, Vivekananda also says that the Absolute can be described as Sat-Chit-Ananda. The concepts of Sat (existence) and Chit (consciousness) are similar to the Sat and Chit of Advaita Vedanta, but the concept of Ananda (bliss) has been greatly enriched by Vivekananda. Partly under the influence of Buddhism and partly under that of Christianity, Vivekananda makes 'love' the essential core of 'bliss', He asserts that ananda is in love.

In fact, Vivekananda believes that the religious urges and aspirations of man demand satisfaction, and that demand can be met only by a personal god. Vivekananda believes that Absolute and God are not two – that God is not a creation of Maya. These distinctions surely arise on account of ignorance or our limited ways of apprehension, but knowledge means the realization of the irrelevance of such a distinction.

Vivekananda has a very deep faith in God. This faith expresses itself in the conviction that it is, in fact, impossible to live without faith in God. In fact, at times Vivekananda does not feel inclined to make any effort for the demonstration of God's existence. He feels
that it is possible to have a direct realization of God. He is convinced
that Swami Ramakrishna had a direct realization of God. So he
thinks that arguments, proofs, demonstrations etc. are not actually
needed for establishing God's existence; His existence can be felt
and realized. At some places Vivekananda has referred to certain
demonstrations that appear to be similar to the traditional
teleological proof for God's existence. He says:

The whole of nature at best could teach them only of a
personal being who is the ruler of the Universe; it could
teach nothing further. In short out of the external world
we can only get the idea of an architect, that which is
called Design Theory. (Works 1:353)

Vivekananda seeks to prove God on the strength of the
necessity of God's notion. Its rejection, according to Vivekananda, is
impossible. God's idea is shown to be necessary on various grounds.
It is necessary because it is the Truth and Truth is necessary. It is
necessary also because it is freedom. The fact of human freedom
presupposes the ideal of absolute freedom which is nothing but
Divine Freedom. It is necessary also because it is inherently present
in man. Vivekananda asserts:
It is the God within your own self that is propelling you to seek for Him, to realize Him. After long researches here and there, in temples and in churches, earths and in heavens, at last you come back, completing the circle from where you started, to your own soul. (*Works II*:81)

God has also been conceived as supreme Goodness. Goodness to Vivekananda, does not mean mere moral perfection because from the point of view of God the question of morality is also irrelevant – in God there is no distinction between good and evil. According to Vivekananda, Divine Goodness has two implications. First, it means that God is bliss and happiness. Secondly, it implies that it is possible for every individual to be good if he fixes up the Supreme Goodness as his ideal.

This takes us to assert yet another character of God to which Vivekananda has given a unique importance. God, according to him, is a human God. This assertion, far from being anthropomorphic represents a very great truth. It does not suggest that God has been cast in man’s image, on the other hand, it suggests that man bears the spark of Divinity within himself. Vivekananda is conscious that one of the greatest justifications of God is the fact that
God is able to satisfy our urges and needs, and is able to provide to our life greater vitality and strength. Therefore, God has to be given some human attributes just in order to make communication possible. Therefore, Vivekananda says:

He has human attributes, He is merciful, He is just, He is powerful, He is almighty, He can be approached, He can be prayed to, He can be loved in return, and so forth. In one word, He is a human god, only infinitely greater than man. \((\text{Works II:40})\)

But, this does not take away from Vivekananda his basic Vedantic convictions. He is convinced that properly speaking God cannot be described. Our language is inadequate to represent Him accurately. These attempts to represent the characters of God are nothing but our limited ways of trying to know the unknown. Vivekananda says:

You cannot describe Him by any language. All attempts of language, calling Him father, or brother, or our dearest friend, are attempts to objectify God, which cannot be done. He is the eternal subject of everything. \((\text{Works II:184})\)
An attempt to determine the nature of the world naturally raises the question of its origin. Is the world a creation? This question becomes very significant in the philosophy of Vivekananda because Vivekananda conceives the cosmos more or less in Sankara’s way. Sankara believes that in reality there has never been any creation. Creation, according to Sankara is unreal. It is true that he also comes to discuss the process of creation, but that has validity only from a lower – the empirical point-of-view.

Vivekananda tries to strike a balance between the two positions. He has to accept the basic monistic position of Advaita Vedanta, but he somehow gives to the world also a reality. God is the only real principle. It is true that in the state of realization, the distinction between the creator and the created would not exist, but for all practical purposes, creation has to be conceived as real. Creation can best be described as the expression of the creator in finite forms. Vivekananda raises the question, “How has the Infinite – the absolute, become the finite?” (Jnana 119-120)

They are not metaphysical realities because they are not independent units. Time is entirely a dependent existence, it changes with every change of our mind. The same time may appear to one as
very long, and to another as very short. At times, the idea of time vanishes altogether. In dream, sometimes, one imagines that one has lived for several years, and at other times, years pass just in a second. So time is entirely dependent on our state of mind. It is so with space and causation as well. Spatial dimensions depend on our angles of vision, likewise what is 'cause' from one point of view is 'effect' from another point of view. They are also dependent on our mind. Space, Time and Causation are not independent entities also because they cannot exist all by themselves separate from other things. We cannot have any idea of abstract space or abstract time or abstract causation. Thus, they do not have any independent existence.

Creation is not a completed process, the world does not come out of God as a finished product. Vivekananda seems to be in favour of, what can be called, perpetual creation. Creation, according to him, is timeless, having no beginning or end. The universe is just a manifestation – an expression of God and the question of time cannot be raised with respect to this. He says:

It is not that this world was created the other day, not that a god came and created the world and since that
time has been sleeping, for that cannot be. The creative energy is still going on. God is eternally creating. He is never at rest. (Works III:122)

It shows that Vivekananda has tried to combine the notions of ‘creation’ and ‘evolution’. Theories of evolution find it difficult to explain the beginning of everything, even Darwin could not explain how the first living cells came to be. Vivekananda’s theory of creation is able to explain the origin of cosmos, and he explains the growth of the world in terms of an evolutionary process. According to him, everything in nature grows from certain subtle form to its grosser form. He tries to explain this fact with the help of the analogy of ‘Ocean and waves’.

Some anthropologists have claimed that the origin of religious thought lies in some form of animism. The primitive man found himself unable to explain the phenomena of dream, unconsciousness and death. He was forced to believe that the real man was not the man that was apparently seen moving and living. This crude idea about the mysterious being started taking shape as man’s capacity to think and speculate grew. That is why
Vivekananda says that this was the main object of inquiry for the Upanishads.

...the Katha Upanisad begins with the inquiry: when a man dies there is a dispute. One party declares that he has gone for ever, the other insists that he is still living, which is true? He himself tries to answer the question by saying, Two positions remain to mankind. One is to believe with the nihilists that all is nothing, that we know nothing, that we can never know anything either about the future, the past or even the present...Then there is the other position to seek for an explanation, to seek for the real...In this body which is an aggregate of molecules of matter, is there anything which is real.

(Jnana 21)

Vivekananda seeks for the real in his own way. According to him the real in man is a sort of a ‘concentration of spiritual energy’ Man, according to him, is a spirit. The word ‘spirit’ has both a negative import and a positive one. Usually the negative import is given more prominence, it is believed that the spiritual is not the ordinary, is different from the empirical. Vivekananda would not
reject this implication of the word 'spiritual'. Man is not what he ordinarily appears to be. Over and above this, Vivekananda also asserts that man is spiritual in positive terms also – because he represents some aspirations and urges which only he is capable of having. He has devoted much time and energy in trying to determine the spiritual dimensions of man; his emphasis on spirituality is so great that even the bodily aspects of man get spiritualized.

Thus, the picture of man that emerges in the philosophy of Vivekananda is an organized unity of the physical and the spiritual. Vivekananda never undermines the importance of the physical nature of man. The very fact that man is always asked to awaken his spirituality, presupposes that there is a side of man that is somewhat different from and yet akin to his spiritual nature. That is his physical nature. This uniqueness of his physical nature is also due to the presence of spirituality in him. Although Vivekananda, at least initially, does not deny reality to the physical side of man, he is convinced that this represents only his inferior nature. His real nature consists in his capacity of going beyond his physical nature. Vivekananda describes the true nature of man as Soul Force or Atman. In his descriptions of the Atman Vivekananda has freely
used even exaggerated expressions. Following the *Gita* he describes the Atman thus:

> It is the self, beyond all thought, one without birth or death, whom the sword cannot pierce or fire burn, whom air cannot dry or water melt, the beginning less and endless, the unmoving, the intangible, the omniscient, the omnipotent Being, that it is neither the body nor the mind, but beyond them all. (*Works* I:141)

Vivekananda tries to explain the difference between soul's real nature and its apparent nature in various ways. He consistently maintains that apparent diversity in no way affects the true nature of man. The self or soul is one all-comprehending existence, and it only appears as manifold. He tries to illustrate this idea with the help of various analogies. For example, Look at the waves of the sea, different waves appear to be different, but in reality they are all one, they are not different from the Ocean. Adopting the Vedantic analogy of 'Pratibimba' Vivekananda says that the same sun may shine in its reflections on water kept in different pots, but the different reflections are only apparent – 'reflections' of the sun, the real sun is always one:
There is, therefore, but one Atman, one self, eternally pure, eternally perfect, unchangeable, unchanged; it has never changed; and all these various changes in the universe are but appearances in that one self.

(*Jnana* 350)

Vivekananda unhesitatingly asserts that the apparent plurality of selves and the apparent experiences of births and deaths are only apparent. In reality the question of their being many selves or the question regarding births and deaths is a misleading question. The one Atman neither comes nor goes, it is neither born, nor does it die, the question of its re-incarnation does not arise. Like the Vedantist, Vivekananda also believes that the Atman is, in fact, never deluded. In the state of realization the Atman clearly becomes aware that plurality of selves is an illusion and that this illusion itself is a sporting play of the Atman.

We have seen that the real nature of man is freedom. Freedom is not conceived as a character or a quality belonging to the soul; it constitutes the very essence of the soul. A quality or a character is something different from that to which it belongs, but freedom does not belong to the soul, the soul is freedom. Vivekananda also
believes in the Law of Karma. He is of the opinion that our actions produce tendencies, in accordance with which our future lives are determined. Vivekananda is aware of this problem, and solves it in a number of ways. First, he says that freedom does not mean absence of all kinds of determining factors, in that case freedom would be a state of chaos. Freedom, truly speaking, does not mean 'no-determination', it means self-determination, which suggests that the free agent is determined not by anything else but by himself. If this is understood, freedom and karma no longer remain incompatible with each other. Man's karmas determine his nature, but they are man's karmas, his own actions create tendencies that bear fruits for the future. Secondly, karma does not contradict man's freedom because final escape rests ultimately again on man's own actions. By his own good deeds man can win over his ignorance and suffering. That also shows that man is basically free. Again, Vivekananda solves this problem more or less in the Vedantic fashion by showing that the apparent incompatibility of karma and freedom is only apparent. The soul-the Atman, in fact, always remains free-is never in bondage. The apparent state of karma – bondage, is really delusion created by ignorance; it is merely a Lila in which the soul
has become involved. When he would finally win over this delusion he would be amused to find that he was, in fact, never in bondage. Referring to the question about the nature of immortality, Vivekananda says:

often in the turmoil and struggle of our lives we seem to forget it, but suddenly some one dies – one, perhaps whom we loved, one near and dear to our hearts, is snatched away from us – and the struggle, the din and turmoil of the world around us cease for a moment and the soul asks the old question, ‘What after this? What becomes of the soul?’ (Jnana 273-274)

The literal meaning of the word ‘Immortality’ is both its minimum meaning and its most universal meaning. Literally, it means deathlessness, by calling the soul immortal; literally we would mean that death is not the ‘end’ of the soul – that the soul survives death. This negative meaning of the word ‘Immortal, is least controversial and universally acceptable. Controversies start when we start giving positive specifications of this state.’

Now, we find that there are two aspects of Immortality, survival and Immortality as such. Survival means merely that death
is not the end of life. At this place Vivekananda takes help from his doctrines of ignorance and karma and incorporate them in his doctrine of the soul. The soul, he says, performs actions in ignorance, certain tendencies and samskaras are created in accordance with which the next birth is determined. For the realization of immortality the soul has to grow – evolve, but nothing which is not already there can evolve. This is a fact of experience, having the testimony of science also behind it. The seed, for example, grows into a tree only because the tree is already potentially contained in the seed. The child grows into an adult only because the child is potentially the adult. Thus, it can be said that the soul is able to realize immortality because the soul is immortal. Immortality is latent in him, soul in ignorance is not aware of it, he has to be made aware, the latent element of Immortality has to be fully manifested. That would be the realization of immortality. Vivekananda says that it is like finding the lost necklace on one’s own neck. All the time he searches for it in all directions, and it is there with him.

Secondly, the nature of evolutionary growth also is in favour of this. From the lowest protoplasm to the most perfect human being there is
but one life. Immortality is also the consummation of the growth of man, and, therefore, we shall have to believe that it is the same basic being which expresses itself from the beginning to the end. Vivekananda says:

The whole of the manifestation of this one series, from the protoplasm upto the most perfect man, must be the very same thing as cosmic life. First it got involved and became finer, and out of that fine something; which was the cause, it has gone on evolving, manifesting itself, and becoming grosser...there is nothing new, there will be nothing new. The same series of manifestations are presenting themselves alternately like a wheel coming up and going down. (Jnana 278)

Our yearning for mukti, the desire to win over death is also taken as a sign of our immortality. Our desires do have an object, it is true that some of our desires are not fulfilled, but that does not mean either that these desires are fantastic or that the objects of these desires are unreal. Genuine desires have always something real as their objects. That shows that our desire for immortality itself is an evidence of immortality. And, nobody can say that this desire is
unreal, because we always have a yearning to win over death. We always long for more of life. Therefore, we have got to accept that there is an actual object of this desire for immortality.

In fact, Vivekananda feels that it involves almost a contradiction to think of the soul's mortality. The soul is the embodiment of a forceful life; it is actually leading a powerful life. How can then it be involved in death which is the negation of life? That is why; no individual can ever imagine his own mortality. If anybody tries to think about his own punishment, he will find the thought queer, if not entirely absurd. Vivekananda says that even to imagine my own annihilation I shall have to stand by and look on as a witness. This inability on our part to imagine our own mortality is itself an evidence of the fact that we are after all immortal.

Vivekananda, more or less, in the manner of the ancient Hindu philosophy, says that it is only when man is able to pass beyond the cycle of births and rebirths that he is able to attain immortality. Births are guided by the karma performed by the self. Particular kinds of karma cause birth, a different kind of karma will stop this process. Now, two questions arise: (a) What would be that kind of action that would stop this cycle and enable the soul to attain
immortality? And (b) What happens after immortality is attained, that is to say, what is the nature or the status of the soul after it has attained immortality? Let us consider the second question first.

He speaks of the possibility of a Divine Life or Sarvamukti (Universal redemption) in which all souls would be liberated. Therefore, he says that attainment of individual immortality is not the ultimate human destiny, it is realization of the redemption of all, and as such, every liberated individual has to work to expedite the process of universal redemption. It is possible for every one to attain immortality, but that does not mean that one’s attaining immortality is a means towards the immortality of all.

But, how can the soul realize immortality? What is the process of this realization? This process can be described in one word, it is yoga. What is yoga? This word normally is associated with two kinds of meanings. It may mean union or it may stand for a kind of a discipline. Vivekananda uses the term in a very comprehensive manner, and therefore, incorporates both these meanings in his sense of the word yoga. Thus, the path leading to the realization is the path of Discipline and Union. It would consist of certain disciplines – such disciplines as would enable the pursuer to have the feeling of
union. These disciplines might relate themselves to cognition, or to feeling or to action or to a synthesis of all the three. Vivekananda favours the last, but his synthesis, although comprehensive, is of a particular type. He does not say that there is only one kind of yoga incorporating all these in it, on the other hand, he say that all these—the way of cognition, the way of feeling, the way of karma—are themselves different ways for the realization of immorality. They are not inconsistent with each other, they are not rival ways, they are complementary to each other. Vivekananda is so comprehensive in his outlook that he includes even ‘yoga’ in the popular sense (as meditation through postural adjustment) as one of the alternative ways. Before emphasizing their synthetic or complementary characters it is better to have an idea of these ways.

The way of knowledge is based on the realization that bondage is due to ignorance. Ignorance, according to Vivekananda, is the ignorance of the real nature of things; it is the inability to distinguish between the real and the unreal. This lack of discrimination is ignorance, and therefore, knowledge has to be discriminatory, it must have an awareness of the distinction between the real and the unreal. Self-knowledge, knowledge of the Brahman, knowledge of
the unity of everything—all these are different names of the discriminatory knowledge mentioned above.

Such a knowledge cannot be had merely through study or by listening to the words of wise teacher. They are also necessary, but they would not rise above the level of mere information, unless one is able to realize what he has been able to gather through study or through his teacher. For such a realization, he must be able to meditate upon the truths learnt. This requires the practice of concentration on the nature of the truths learnt.

Concentration is not an easy process. It requires that the self should direct his entire energy on the object of concentration. The energy of the soul is wasted through its bodily activities, through the senses and the motor organs. Energy must be withdrawn from them so that it may be utilized for the purposes of knowledge. It means that the senses and the body have to be kept in control, sense-gratification must be stopped, body must be kept under restraint, even the mind must be brought under control. This practically amounts to the suppression of bodily desires, it means that the demands of the senses have to be curtained almost ruthlessly.
Vivekananda says that renunciation is a necessary stage in the practice of Jnana-yoga. Renunciation demands getting rid of all selfishness and controlling the body, the mind and the senses, this is called vairagya. But, according to Vivekananda, there is a positive side of renunciation also, it is being impelled by nothing else but the longing to know the Brahma. This positive aspiration for knowledge is an essential condition of Renunciation.

After this, concentration can be practised. The entire energy of the body can be concentrated in the direction of knowledge. In the initial stages of concentration one can choose any form. He may even try to understand the various divine characters. In course of time this concentration will become intenser, and the individual may attain the stage of complete concentration or Samadhi, in which all kinds of distractions would melt away, in which even the distinction between the self and the Brahman will not remain, and he will have a realization of oneness, of perfect unity. This is the Jnana-marga.

This is the way of knowing God through intensity of feeling. Vivekananda says that strong emotions have the capacity to awaken and activate the potential powers of man. As such, it is possible to activate it so much that man is able to know God himself. Ordinary
emotion can be converted into powerful feelings, ordinary love into Divine Love or Supreme Devotion. This is the Bhakti Marga. Devotion or love, according to Vivekananda is natural to man. The only point is that ordinarily the object of our love is the finite object which is transitory, perishable and, unreal. Love, in this sense, is not pure love but attachment. The Bhakti-marga is the way of pure love in which the object of love or devotion is not the finite or the limited, but the Supreme. This love will be universal love, love for all, because this will be based on the realization of oneness of everything. He says that it is possible to realize God simply by ‘loving’. We may go on extending the scope of our love, so as to make it more and more comprehensive till it becomes truly universal. Vivekananda is able to determine the steps through which the Bhakti-yoga progresses towards the realization of the Supreme. The first stage is the stage of external worship. The ordinary man is not able to concentrate on the subtler expressions of God, and hence he begins his worship in a gross manner. In this stage, idols and images, representations of Gods and Goddesses, incarnations -even prophets and Godmen- are all objects of devotion and worship. Idol-worship is the most popular form of external worship. Then, in the
next stage, prayer and repetition of God's name, chanting of religious bymns and singing the songs of God's glory would become prominent. In the third stage, this kind of prayer is transcended, and in its place a sort of a silent meditation starts. Vivekananda says that in this final stage even this distinction vanishes, the devotee becomes almost one with the Supreme. This is a kind of inner realization – a vision of the omnipresent God. These are all stages of Bhakti, through which the devotee attains a realization and a feeling of the essential oneness of everything.

Vivekananda says that this marga is the most convenient and the most popular of all the ways. It is natural to man, and it does not require any special aptitude or capacity or resources which other ways require. That is why this appears to be the easiest also. Vivekananda says:

Karma-yoga...is a system of ethics and religion intended to attain freedom through unselfishness and by good works. The Karma-yogi need not believe in any doctrine whatsoever. He may not ask what his soul is, nor think of any metaphysical speculation. He has got his own
special aim of realizing selflessness, and he has to work it out himself. (Karma 131-132)

Such a description of karma-yoga shows that it emphasizes, first, the importance and value of action, and secondly of unselfishness. The first emphasis shows that it does not recommend asceticism or a flying away from the world. Man has to remain in the world, in the midst of evil and good, and pain and suffering. And he has to work, has to keep on working as well as he can. The second emphasis is still more important. The Karma-yogi has to work for unselfishness, which means that his work has to be non-attached. He has to work as if he is a stranger to the world, he must not allow any work to dominate over him or to bind him. Vivekananda says that one must work like a master and not like a slave. If one allows personal or selfish considerations to regulate his actions, he has become a slave of his desires. One must be unattached. Vivekananda seems to be very much impressed by the Gita-Ideal of Nishkamakarma is that one must not expect anything in return of the action done. One must assume the permanent role of a giver, in which everything given is a free offering to the world. Vivekananda says:
He works best who works without any motive, neither for money, nor for fame, nor for anything else; and when a man can do that, he will be a Buddha, and out of him will come the power to work in such a manner as will transform the world. This man represents the very highest ideal of Karma-yoga. (*Karma* 142-143)

Raja-Yoga is the way to the realization of immortality by controlling the mind and the body. This control is not like the control recommended by the Jnana-Yogi, it is controlling the mind and the body by subjecting them to certain physical and mental discipline. Patanjali laid the foundation of such a yoga in his *Yoga-sutra*, and according to some, it is the surest – the most direct and the quickest method for attaining salvation. That is why they call it Raja-yoga, the king of all yogas. By definition, its aim is the realization of unity with God. It is believed that this marga consists of a ruthless suppression of all hindrances that create difficulties in the way of realization.

Raja-yoga is the way of physical and mental discipline. It is based on the pre-supposition that bondage is due to the distraction of the soul. Therefore, they must be brought under control so that the
energy wasted by them may be saved and directed towards the Supreme. But, to control the body and the mind, a direct and forceful method has to be adopted. That is why in Raja-yoga a plan of physical and mental disciplines has to be worked out. That would involve certain yogic exercises of the psycho-physical nature. Even here the final stage is that of concentration, but the conviction is that perfect concentration cannot be practised unless the psycho-physical organism is put completely at ease and under complete control of the individual. Vivekananda is aware that this method is not for the weak, as it requires an immense faith in oneself and also physical and mental strength. It gradually enables the yogi to acquire certain excellences and powers, and finally the yogi is able to unite with the Divine.

Although Vivekananda describes these four ways differently, he says that they are different ways for the realization of the same goal. These four different ways are recommended in view of the fact that men differ in their temperaments, dispositions and capacities. It is quite possible that a particular person is incapable of following the Jnana-marga, and finds the way of Devotion convenient and to his liking. Therefore, Vivekananda feels that one can choose the path he
likes. If one follows any one of these paths with sincerity and earnestness, he will be able to reach the goal.

Moreover, these paths are not completely exclusive of each other. In fact, in certain respects they overlap. It is not that the man of 'Devotion has nothing to do with the way of knowledge; he also performs certain acts of self-sacrifice. These ways, therefore, are not divided into water-tight compartments. Vivekananda gives perfect liberty to the individual for choosing and pursuing the course that he likes best. The only thing is that there must be a very strong and intense sincerity and a sense of purpose. Vivekananda asserts that realization requires a very radical regeneration of the individual; he must be transformed morally, religiously and spiritually. Therefore, whatever be the way, the entire energy of the soul has to be put into it.

In brief his philosophy is for the good of the masses. It may safely be called a philosophy for laymen without ceasing to be one for the most elevated philosophers. He shows several paths to the ultimate reality and leaves it for everyone to choose his own. The relevance of his philosophy is sure to go on increasing in the world,
which is sinking deeper into the darkness of materialism and worldliness. It will serve as beacon light forever in future.