

VEDĀNTIC SOCIALISM OF SWĀMI VIVEKĀNANDA

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The Upaniṣadic thought and moral teaching stand Supreme as regards to the social and intellectual influence especially in the modern period. Swāmi Vivekānanda was a great man and a respected personality of the world. The practical philosophy of Swāmi Vivekānanda has become a role model for many great people around the world, especially in India. Service of man must be regarded as service to God. In his own words – “I don’t believe in a God or Religion which can’t wipe the widow’s tears or bring a piece of bread to the orphan’s mouth”.¹

Swāmi Vivekānanda developed his own philosophy of Advaita Vedānta out of his own spiritual and moral experience. He said “As manifested beings we appear separate, but as a reality we are one. The more we think ourselves separate from this whole, the more miserable we become”.² So, Advaita is the basic of ethics. Vivekānanda’s Vedāntic Socialism is based on this principle of Advaitic ethics. He gave his own ideas about Socialism. He always urged social Justice and social equality. He said that “I am a socialist not because I think it is a perfect system, but half a loaf is better than no bread”.³ It has to be made perfect. It is good only because it has created in the masses a hope for the future. Vivekānanda’s Vedāntic Socialism is essentially a Vedāntic Humanism and this gives a new dimension and a new depth to Vedāntism. He was a socialist because socialism came nearest to the idea of Advaita.

Vivekānanda’s idea of practical Vedānta is rooted in his philosophy of liberation or spiritual freedom through right action as he found it in the Bhagavadgīta. He discovered the foundation of his perspective of ethics within Advaita Vedānta itself. According to him “Love everyone as your

own self, because the whole universe is one. In injuring another, I am injuring myself; in loving another, I love myself".⁴ Vivekānanda was deeply moved by the miserable conditions of the society. He certainly wanted a new economic arrangement and a new social structure for the welfare of the masses. He always wished the idea of social unity and constituting a single society without any distinction.

Vivekānanda's spiritualistic humanism is an identity of humanity with divinity. This humanism is also called idealistic humanism. His humanism is derived from the idea of the science of spiritual possibilities. All human development is based upon the discovery of these possibilities dormant within every one. It is clear in his utterance that each soul is potentially divine and the aim is to realize the divinity.⁵ Vivekānanda stated that "It is God within yourselves that is propelling you to seek for him, to realise Him".⁶

Vivekānanda who was inspired and illuminated by the Upaniṣads held that the human nature is pure, free and divine. He often quoted the opening words of the Īśāvāsyopaniṣad- "Īśāvāsyamidam sarvam yatkiñca jagatyām jagat, tena tyaktena bhuñjīthaḥ, ma grḍhah kasya sviddhanam". Vivekānanda's assumption of human purity elevates the place of man in the society and universe. In such a society all men are free and deserve equal opportunities. As a humanist he is highly concerned about the poor and down-trodden. He is against religious superstitions and dogmas. He is also against the supremacy of any class in the society.

Swāmi Vivekānanda believed in the theory of 'Karmayoga'. He believed that "unselfishness" is more paying; only people do not have the patience to practice it. It is more paying from the point of view of health also. Love, truth, unselfishness etc are not merely moral figures of speech, but they form our highest ideal, because in them lies such a manifestation of power.⁸ He says "Inactivity should be avoided by all means". Activity always means resistance. Resist all evils mental and physical and when you have succeeded in resisting, then will calmness come.⁹

According to Vivekānanda, 'our duty to others means helping others, doing good to the world. We should always try to help the world. That should be the highest motive in us.¹⁰ Advaitic expression of oneness is what we call love and sympathy, and it is the basis of all our ethics and morality.

This is summed up in the Advaitic philosophy by the celebrated aphorism, 'Tattvamasi' - That Thou Art.¹¹

In the opinion of Vivekānanda, man is inevitably and constantly moving towards Advaita, knowing or unknowing. The underlying unity of existence is the main motive of human activity. He said, "All things sentient and insentient, are rushing shelter-shelter towards unity."¹² Vivekānanda said, "Advaita, the unity of all existence as the only possible basis of a universal religion. Advaita does not recognize any religion or racial or national boundaries."¹³ His profound love for humanity was simply boundless.

Vivekānanda was an optimist and as such, he believed that socialism was the best ideology that India could adopt. He advocated this ideology as a part of his programme of remolding Indian Society. To him, for remaking Indian society, a movement or an active struggle was necessary. He considered the social reconstruction a means for social regeneration which in turn would lead to national liberation. As a great teacher of human values, he believed that society should consist of certain values. These values were absolutely necessary for the perpetuation of an ideal society. He said "To advance oneself towards freedom physical, mental and spiritual and help others to do so is the supreme goal of human life."¹⁴ As a revolutionary spiritualist, Vivekānanda stood for spiritual freedom of the individual which could be attained by three fold means of work, worship, and knowledge.¹⁵ But Vivekānanda did not stop there. He also demanded the material or external freedom of man; he was convinced that without material freedom, spiritual freedom is meaningless. In his view both are complementary. Thus he interpreted the Indian traditional thought and values in the universal language for modern society.

To Swāmi Vivekānanda and to those inspired by him, regeneration of India became the first step in reconstructing the spiritual order of the world. That is why all Indians- freedom fighters, revolutionaries, social reformers, institution builders and economic reconstructors- drew inspiration from the life and message of Swāmi Vivekānanda. As a socialist his contribution to Indian renaissance is immensely rich. He expounded Neo- Vedāntism, which, in the words of Romain Rolland "spread like burning alcohol in the veins of intoxicated India. The greatest contribution of Vivekānanda is that he laid the foundation of New india".¹⁶ Vedāntic socialism of Swāmi Vivekānanda

has thus a message for all people irrespective of caste, creed and religion and has a universal role to play. He is a man of socialism, who is not of the age but of all ages.

References :

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