

The Role of Practical Vedanta of Swami Vivekanand

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Nationality has to come out from the mind of the nationals and that is not possible if it is preoccupied with narrowness, superstitions, religious bigotry and the sense of slavery. The pride of nation cannot be experienced if one does not realize in him the divinity, the strength of unity and equality and the hold of fraternity and sovereignty. The Renaissance in India to me was a philosophical awakening having deep concern with reformation by way of emancipating the mind from the dogmatic ideologies working as ignorance in the progressive manifestation of the divine in humanity.

Apart from the movement of Brahmasamaja in the national awakening of Bengal, Vivekananda's advocacy of the most comprehensive, secular, and morally and spiritually properous Hindutva left very deep and perpetual ethico-religious impression on the Indian Renaissance. Here in this paper, I want to present an appraisal of his contributions and their relevance in the present time of ccultural crisis. Vivekananda is a Practical Vedantic. Vedantic philosophy, based on Upanisads, Gita and Brahmasutras, is an outcome of the realization of the identity of personal and social reality. For his Vedanta, individual is not a part of the reality but one and same with the all comprehensive reality. It is so venerable that the great masters have incessantly intepreted in and those interpretations shed light from time to time s the ideal to be lived.

Vedanta i popularly taken as a philosophy based on Advitic metaphysics for which the Reality is non-dual; the individual consciousness is substantilly the same reality and the world is false. The whole metaphysical system of Advaita Vedanta is based on two logics : "Abadhivam hi satyavam" that is, the reality is not sublated in any fraction of time-past, present and future and ii. "Badhitvam hi anirvaaniyatvam", that is, those fublated are false (Mithya). These two

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characteristics were as the distinct criteria of two different sorts of existences out of which the theorists, emphasizing former, admit 'all is spirit' and hence true while the theorists emphasizing later, accept the world of knowing and doing as false because they fear that accepting world as real will amount to a dualistic position. If the later type of existences is false, what is the need of promoting the cause of the world that amounts to promoting falsity? It was, perhaps, the reason that Dvaita Vedanta is considered as a philosophy of the transcendental with which spiritual seekers are concerned. The Vedantic Interpretation of contemporary Indian Philosophers realized the issue that, in the scheme of all is spirit; there is nothing that is false. It is not the world or the individual being but the sense of diversity that is false because that is only to be sublated and when sublated, the sense of identity comes forward with a vision 'all is spirit'. Diverse interpretations of Vedantic metaphysics and different logics given for different sorts of existences, despite Vedantic metaphysics and different logics given for different sorts of existences, despite accepting all is spirit, pave a way to the philosophers for realizing the time for intensively working out ethical and social significance of Vedanta without involving in unnecessary metaphysical controversies. The contribution of Vivekananda among those visualizers stands highly relevant today and I can say that it is relevant for all and for all the times as a philosophy for serving humanity as one's service to own.

He appears to me a spiritist humanist whose mission was to liberate the mind of the humanity from philosophical and religious superstitions so as to help realization of the same spirit within and out. We are privileged to evaluate the originality and spirit of Vivekananda's thoughts, his attempt of freeing the thoughts of men from different sectarian ideologies, the grasp of his intellect and the wonderful analytic and synthetic sectarian poer of his mind from his numerous lectures and writing available in our possession. For many reasons, he appears to me a non-technical philosopher who cared less for systematic theorization of Vedantic concepts but more for freedom of thoughts, their applications and practical implication. His concept of impersonal God as the logical or rational necessity for the acceptance of the personal, individual, universe and the God. The use of the term 'Maya' in a non-technical sense of errors and weaknesses, his idea of religion of the spirit without an imaginary God as an external master to which, as it is generally presumed by religious sects, everything and thoughts are subordinated. His idea of universal religion may be indigestive respectively to technical academicians and to the faith of religious sects as well but have such practical implications in molding the life on the earth to divinity that makes his philosophy of everlasting relevance.

I confine my reflections, in this paper, to some of the implications of his philosophy of spirit and to the observation of their relevance against the cultural crisis of our times.

1. Philosophy of Spirit

Though Vivekananda was a disciple of Ramakrishna, a great mystic, he was of the view that superstitions can easily masquerade as mysticism and preached that for a man making religion truth must be open; it is strengthening. He says 'Occultism and mysticism have very nearly destroyed us and suggested to give up them as they make men meak)¹. In brief, his movement can better be termed a the movement for the freedom of thoughts or of spirit from all sorts of superstitions responsible for one's hypnotized or inauthentic life.

The central philosophy of Vivekananda, in one line, is the socialization of the Vedantic philosophy of spirit. Unlike Sankara, he does not make a distinction between absolute and God and uses both of the terms in the same sense of the spirit. According to his interpretation, and absolute is not one or many but the whole encompassing all diversities from the lowest sand particle to the highest Brahman. He interpreted Vedanta as a philosophy of the spirit, the spirit, the spirited philosophy relevant for molding the life on the earth, however deprived it may be, to the manifestation of the highest possible divinity. realization of spirit, for him, is the realization of God in each particle on the earth and, thus, to love and to identify with all as one's own self. He does not see God a different from universe, rather, identifies the realization of spirit as the realization of God and of the universe to emphasize socio-religious unity of the reality that for him is not one but unity which is expressed as one and many. According to his argument of the unity of the spirit, the difference between man and man and women, human and animal is only qualitative which can be removed by manifestation of divinity to the extent of realization of all as one's own spirit and even so by one's own efforts.

2. Reply to the dichotomy of the personal and impersonal

Some religions very often occupy themselves with the idea of personal God while some others out rightly reject it on the cost of meeting the dichotomy of personal and impersonal. Vivekananda² does not reject the idea of personal God but considers that such an idea as ultimate is not only insufficient but is irrational also. The idea of impersonal, higher than the personal or rather highest, is inevitable for

acceptance and explanation of the personal itself. The former is limited or finite which the latter is infinite but the former can be preserved, even for the reasons sake, by the idea of impersonal. As individual, for Universalists, is not separate from universal, the personal is not different from impersonal as it, on further rationalization or generalization, is the manifestation of the impersonal. I shall explain this issue in the course.

As we have seen, the whole, for him, is absolute; but within it every particle is in a constant state of the flux and change. The spirit is unchangeable and changeable at the same time. It is impersonal and personal in one. It is, in very brief, his conception of universe of motion and of God and that is what he meant by the Upanishadic great saying "tattvamasi" (thou are that).

3. Religious crisis and the Practical Vedanta

Now days, in the name of religion a number of religious sects have emerged with some disguised ideology. In the name of religions, they are active groups in the country and having their roots in overseas. They are, in fact, active mafia groups in a disguised robe of god men, helpful in befooling the people of faith. They, under the curtain of religious prophesy, are working for preservation of the materialistic hunger and sexually uncontrolled life of the members of the group.

Religion, as Vivekananda conceives, must be broad enough to include all minds. Swami Bhasyananand remarks 'it is necessary to stimulate religious thinking in the highest sense so that any clash of thoughts will awaken new thoughts, not quarrels. Sects may remain, but there should be no sectarianism. There are whirlpools in stagnant water. Such water only begets moss and is unfit for use. Freedom should be given to every individual to follow his chosen pattern of rituals and myths³. It is the weakness of religions that they preach to subscribe the authority of imaginary things exterior to the spirit and teach men not to think over the superstitions. He writes 'I believe in reason and follow reason, having seen enough of the evils of the authority other than the spirit⁴.

According to Vivekananda, thinking and thoughts of each man vary. Even there is no seer whose ideas are not different from others (Nasau muniryasya matam na bhinna). A spiritualist is a Universalist in the sense that he tries to reconcile the differences even opposites, not only as the manifestation of the same spirit but as the unmanifested spirit having the potency to the manifested as the same spirit also.

The diversity and differences between lives, for him, are not qualitative; as substantially all are same spirit, but are quantitative as there are open possibilities to actualize deprived a being in there, the same spirit. Religion of Vedanta, as he thinks denies entirely the ideas that animal are separate from men and that they were made and created by God to be used for our food. The difference is only in degree and not in kind. From the spiritual standpoint, these differences have no importance and can be removed by changing the limited sense and broadening the spirit with in⁵.

Religion of spirit is a religion meant for sublimating a man to divinity but not a religion among many sectarian religions. It is not exactly the synthesis of many religions, not a culmination based on a process of generalization of the noble ideals of different religions but a religion very deeply concerned with working out the truth or spirit without a claim of itself as ultimate. Separate authority of only the book of one's faith, the man-worship including worship of a priest or a prophet, and angel or even a God and the bigotry that his faith is the only faith ultimate and acceptable, are basic superstitions of a sectarian religion but according to his religion of spirit all books all prophets, all faiths are of relative importance and the spirit, in his religion of spirit, is only being that is all accommodating. All religions are manifestations or expressions of spirit and they are of relative importance or nurseries for a religious aspirant. Swami Bhajananda rightly observes, "Swami dreamt of universal religion. However, his concept of universal religion is not to extend Vedanta into all parts of the world convert people to its fold as Christianity and Islam have been attempting to do all these centuries. His idea of universal religion is the co-existence of all the religions, each accepting the best element of the other⁶."

Religion not only in India but also in almost all countries of the world is more and more centralizing on the superstitions sponsored by so called God men. It is becoming increasingly mysterious and is destroying the reasoning power of the common person. According to the observations of Vivekananda, all powers in the universe are already ours. We put our hands before our eyes, cry that it is dark, and rush to Gods or god-men to make us see the things that cannot be seen if we keep our eyes closed.

He makes a difference between the life hypnotized and the life of spirit. The former, for him, is a false life, a life of a slave whether of God or of prophet or of book, rituals or any such separatist superstitions, of which one falsely takes as

ultimate, are weakness and the remedy for these weaknesses is not brooding over them but thinking of strength within us. He says "Teach men of strength that is already within them. Manifest yourselves in a high degree. Faith in ourselves is of the greatest help to us as it is the faith of God within⁷.

I have already indicated earlier that religion, according to Vivekananda, must be broad enough to include different minds and practices. Keeping this matter of fact in view, he defines an atheist as one who does not believe in himself. It is not true to say that he is an atheist who does not believe in a God or in a prophet. The religion of spirit teaches faith in all because you are all. He makes a difference from other thinkers when he says that out of fullness of the heart the mouth speaketh and out of fullness of the heart the hand worketh and action will come. All actions are manifested, transformed by the very power of the thought⁸. The life of work with all divinity and without superstitions is the life of divine energy and action beyond all weaknesses and the person, who follows his vocation, which the spirit, lives a true religious life, a living that gives meaning to one's life.

4. Theological Crisis and Practical Vedanta

There are communal riots and racial severance on the name, number and nature of God. There is super governance of corruption mafia in a disguised form of God men. Their governance is more effective and it has attracted political leaders as agencies under curtain for acquiring politics, property and power. God men are becoming more powerful than the God is and a number of superstitions, division and confusions are prevailing in the mind of masses on the name of religion and spirituality.

According to practical Vedanta, God is not one or many rather all is God. Here we find a concept of God which is very rare in the history of thought. God is such that it is irrational to say that A is the God of my religion and B is the God of his religion. The virtuous manifestations of prophets, priests, seers and all great men, helpful for inspiring one to develop and row divinity, are the manifestations of spirit in different language and are not different from the language of spirit of which those are different expressions. Thus, he suggests that the person believing in the religion of the spirit should respect them as means for a divine life. He considers all practices, instruction worshipping of God, man, rituals and religious sects as nurseries and, hence, be taken as means to realize the universe as one's own spirit. It believes in self-restrained principles speaking remarkably of self-reliance,

self-respect and self-dependence. It is the religions of making a man not near and dear to God but the God himself as it considers that power, protection, wisdom, content and happiness all come from within and not from outside God, prophet, book, God men, etc; which are weakness. Spirit, for him, is the truth and is nobody's property. It is assigned to all as their own soul and one as a religious teacher, has only to accuse that knowledge in fellow beings. He used to say; if you are not God, there never was any God any never will be⁹. Man himself is fit to attain the glory of ultimate and even so by his own efforts. The only precaution, on his part, is to keep him free from weakness and to follow the vocation of spirit, which leads him to self-respect, calmness of mind, freedom, truth, illumination and bliss. Rationality discards the superstition regarding the name, number and nature of God pleaded by God men that causes communal riots and violence in the society. It finds out the confusion caused by god men.

5. Crisis of Values and the Vedantic: Remedy

In the present era of marketization, the present generation is indifferent from the traditional values and is dispositional to adopt the standards imported from the west while persons committed to traditional values look at the post modern ideologies as temporary because of consequence of dehumanization that may lead to deformation of the personality of the human person and the society. It is very difficult to perceive the better one out of the conflicting two ideologies. What will be the ideal of life? Is it to perform virtuous activities based on human values even on the cost of poverty and pain or to earn more and more money by deforming and disregarding the humanity in oneself and in the society?

Practical Vedanta is opposed to none and argues for a life of values based on rationality. Rationality means generalization. Any action or way of life, in Practical Vedanta, is virtuous if it is generalized or is equally applicable to all beings. Post modernist talks of the deformation of traditional values for construction of new values that can make the life more lively but nothing can be said virtue or value if it is not rational or if can not be generalized. If man is a rational being and value has a rational ground, it cannot be deformed by other arguments. Value is not an object of logic about the ideal to be lived for a meaning giving life. One may argue for the rational ground of personal likeness, dislikeness, desire for more and more hedonistic pleasure and the opposite but one can not overlook the generalization as the criterion of rational living and even so this generalization for the welfare of all rationals-the individual and the social.

According to Vivekananda, it is better that humanity should become atheist by following reason than blindly believing in religious superstitions. There is nothing to be taught in religion than the oneness of the universe and faith in one's own life¹⁰. All the works of humanity, for thousands of years past, have been towards this one goal and humankind is yet working it out. It is now our turn to work the truth out and one should not make the path difficult for any by hypostatizing superstitions as truth. It is the voice of the reason to consider that what is made for oneness is truth: for example, love is truth while hatred is false. It is the voice of the reason that we should judge in all our actions that whether they are for separation or for oneness. If it is for oneness, it is right that means, it is applicable for the good for all in all circumstances and if it is for diversity, it is wrong. This is the criterion applicable equally to our moral and social thoughts and deeds as well.

Human being can enjoy the life of hundred years without any tension and aggression if he acts on the principle of Practical Vedanta that recommends performance of action without the longing for fruits that is not assigned to him (*Kurvanneha Karmani Jijivesatah samah*). He is assigned the actions that he has to enjoy with. The wealth is for enjoying; one has to enjoy the wealth without any longing for it. (*Tena tyaktena bhunjitha ma grddhah kasviddhanam*).

Vivekananda's interpretation of four yogas aimed for physical, social, mental and spiritual health is meant for humanistic spiritualistic importance of all quarters of efforts for enabling one to visualize the oneness of spirit in the part and in the whole as well.

The spirit is not a thing in heaven but is assigned to us as our own soul. The only obligatory requirement, in our part, is to manifest gradually to that extent and find ourselves to be the universe, God and more and more spirited by our own efforts. It speaks of the ideal that beings are divine and the divinity is unity. His statement 'feel for others and find that you are growing in oneness' is a direct proof for spiritual humanism based on democratized notion of God¹¹.

Vedanta, for him, is the philosophy of real activity. It is practical Vedanta, Real activity, which is the goal of Vedanta, combined with eternal calmness, the calmness that cannot be fulfilled, the balance of mind that is never disturbed, whatever happens. We all know from our experiences in life that that is the best attitude for work. Vivekananda's spiritism/humanism does not teach universal brotherhood (*vasudhaiva kutumbakam*) but more than that, it teaches 'all is the same spirit'

(vasudevah sarvamiti) that stands as a rational remedy against the present crisis cuses by separatists.

It is humanism is based on a theory according to which there is non-difference between the intellect of man and that of the humankind. There is something that is common in the intellect of all men; therefore, certain things appear to be the same to the intellect of humankind and, therefore, there are cases of objectivity in our knowledge. The highest generalization, according to his philosophy, is the highest rationalization that encompasses all even the opposites. Because of which our reason is satisfied with the idea that the truth of mine is not separate from the truth of yours because of the generalization. It is ubiquitous, all pervading principle and the same is given to us as ourselves and we, in fact, is that (Thou art that).

He propounds the theory of ontological non-difference of all beings. He says whatever is real in the table is that being, and the table form and all other forms are given by our intellect¹².

6. Marketization, corporate world and the Vedantic aim of wealth

Materialistic hunger that seems to be endlessly unsatisfied is rooted deeply in the very frame of the recent people and that has brought into its grip the other aspects of his life-social, ethical, religious and spiritual. Man is not in a position to differentiate³ and to stay for the interests other than the materialistic. With the rise of post modernist in the west, the developing countries in the global world welcome it as if it is the only life style. Life is to be lived and lived with autonomy and pleasure. Every thing can be purchased by money even the relations- mother, father have to be reviewed in the changed setup. Money effects all relations and that all sorts of relations are purchasable. No value that prevents one in his enjoyment of the present mement is significant and that new values must be created that suits the enjoyment of the moment. Man can construct the law, make unjust just and likewise by dint of money. Thus, the old values must be deconstructed to give pace with the construction of new values.

Doubtlessly, Wealth is necessary for the life in the world and that is why Vedantic scheme of Varnasrama and purusarthas recommends the household life in which one earns money through proper labour for the maintenance of one's one and one's family members. Wealth earned by deceitful and inhuman means or by no babolur is abused. Proper distribution of earning for the welfate of the people is the ideal.

7. The perversion of sex and Vedantic Remedy

In post modernistic influences, there is no pious concept of a wife. Women are not mothers and sisters; they are taken as if commodities available for sell and purchase for all purposes even for hiring womb. This has intensified the issue of cultural crisis. In Vedantic thought, free sex and sex-abuse are prohibited for they cause not only perversion in human society but also a number of incurable diseases like AIDS. It recommends sex for the maintenance of the families (prajayaya Kaman) and to check perversion caused by sex abuses. The women are the same spirit or God as the men. Wives are to be respected; they are the source of energy for husbands; they are mothers and sisters. Sex must be enjoyed as a sacrifice (Yajna) helping the maintenance of the divine order of creation. The value of respect of mother is more than one's life. Matri devo bhava pitrdevo bhava, is the crucial teaching for a human life on the earth. In Indian culture one can feel glorified in sacrificing his life against any abuse of the respect of mothers and sisters.

8. Ecological Imbalance and the role of Vedanta

Modern man dares much for more and more profit even on the cost of destroying the nature. Consequently, the world is facing with the dangers of ecological imbalance. The high pressure of carbon dioxide on the earth sphere, water pollution, the destruction of forests and trees for establishing factories, killing animals for luxury, atomic garbage etc., have not only caused ecological imbalance but also have promoted a number of new diseases mysterious for the medicinal cure. Medicines bear out not effect against those diseases.

The teaching of Vedanta philosophy, that the trees, the sun, the moon, the mountains, oceans, rivers, etc. are all deities and are the objects of worship, is highly considerable for checking the dangerous attitude of destroying the nature for monetary gains. Life is 'annamaya' and if the 'anna' giving faculties are polluted, the life is at risk. Vedanta preaches that all, the trees, the sun, the moon, the mountains, oceans, rivers, fire, the air, animals etc. be peaceful for the human life in the world. The life is destroyed if the life-supporting parts are not at peace (Taitt. Up. Anuvaka 7-10).

Conclusion

Vivekananda's ethico-religious thoughts based on sarvatma (all is spirit) ontology of Vedanta brings in its fold the possibilities of highest actualization of the

potencies not only of its believers but of the non-believers, not only of the theists but of the atheists, not only of the believers of traditional values but those of the modern standards also. Modern standards are irritating for the traditional and traditional values, for moderners, are outmoded. Practical Vedanta takes the tasks of liberating the entire human families from their hypnotized life into its fold. It does not talk of renunciation of diseres and material prosperity but talks about sublimating attitude of enjoying the relevance of which cannot be denied by any man having any ideology because a man with an fanatic attitude, absenting himself (his pirit) cannot enjoy anything, even the materialistic prosperity. The man is in great rush for earning more and more welth, power and rewards by means of deforming his self and debasing the society and the nation is to be let off for he is antogonistic to himself and is swept up by the storm of materialistic hunger.

References

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2. See, Lectures on Practical Vedanta, deliverd in London on Nov. 17, 1896.
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6. Swami Vivekanandas Discoveries About India, Swami Bhajananananda, Prabhaudha Bharata, Vol LXXXII, May, 1977, p. 208, Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati, Himalayas.
7. Ibid, p. 17.
8. Ibid, p. 14.
9. See, Lecturers on Practical Vedanta, delivered in London on Nov. 10, 1896, p. 25.
10. Lectures on Practical Vedanta, p. ill, p. 66 delivered in London on Nov. 17, 1896, Advaita Ashrama, Calcuttla, 1987. See also Lectures on Practical Vedanta pt. 1, p. 18, delivered in London on Nove. 10, 1896, Advaita ashrama, Calcutta, 1987.
11. See, Lectures delivered on 28th February 1900.
12. See, Lectures on Practical Fedanta, delivered in London on Nov. 17, 1896, p. 96.
