

# Prospect of Social Peace and Harmony in the Practical Vedanta of Swami Vivekananda

Niranjan Haloi

Swami Vivekananda is widely acknowledged as one of the greatest religious minds and a staunch exponent of Hinduism. His deep conviction in the spirituality of Vedanta Philosophy, his penetrating insight and cogent logic proved the excellence Hinduism before elite audience of the world in the Congress of World Religion in America. Vivekananda got his spiritual thought and ideals from his Guru Ramkrishna Paramhansa who was a famous advocate of Neo-Hinduism. As a worthy disciple of Ramakrishna, Vivekananda spread his Guru's spiritual message throughout the world. Vivekananda preached that if modern man follows the Vedantic truths in the light of Ramakrishna's spiritual experience, then there will be no problem left for humanity<sup>1</sup>. He was of the opinion that an individual can acquire an ideal social nature if combines in himself the spiritual ideals of India with the secular ideals of the West. Today our society (both in India and the world at large) is facing so many social problems like immorality, corruption, broken homes, militancy, extortions, violation of human rights, communal and ethnic violence, casteism, exploitations, war, conflicts, environmental degradation, etc. due to rise of gross sensualism and unabated materialistic tendency. In this paper an attempt is made to address these multifarious social problems which are disturbing the social peace and harmony in the light of Vivekananda's spiritual ideal implicit in his "practical Vedanta".

The basis of Vivekananda's spiritual thought is chiefly Vedanta Philosophy. He preached and spreaded the divine insight in the world inherited by his Guru Ramakrishna. The divine insight which Ramakrishna inherited to his dear disciple Vivekananda (then Narendra Nath Dutt) was Advaitic (Non-Dual) in nature. On theoretic ground Ramakrishna

accepted Sankara's abstract spiritual thought, but he was basically a humanist and applied Advaitic wisdom for the solution of human and social problems. Collective or social liberation was the end and objectives of his philosophy and he sought Vivekananda to do so. He wanted himself from the selfish thought of pursuing individual liberation (Mukti) but his mentor Ramakrishna refrained him from such selfish path. He (Ramakrishna) said, "Sivam Atmani Pasyanti na Pratimasu", i.e. the Absolute (Siva) is pervaded in all human beings. Vivekananda followed his Guru's verdict and devoted himself for the cause of betterment of humanity.

Vivekananda took the mission of reforming Hindu religion by eradicating pre-judices and superstitions. Though he supported Vedanta philosophy, he did not follow Sankara's view of Advaitic philosophy blindly. He conceived an unique view of Vedanta philosophy which is his own. His view of Vedanta is categorized as "Neo-Vedantic Philosophy". Sankara's view of Vedanta is known as unqualified or Abstract Monism. In his view only Brahman is real; it is indeterminate, attributeless and the world is unreal. Vivekananda put forward a different version of the Vedanta known as the "Practical Vedanta". He envisaged a new perspective of seeing that the world is also real as it is the expression of the real Brahman. To denote it separately from Sankara's view of Vedanta it can be termed as Synthetic Vedanta<sup>2</sup>. Vivekananda's Vedanta Philosophy can also be termed as 'Concrete Monism' as he viewed Brahman both as indeterminate (nirguna) and determinate (Svaguna). Like his Guru Ramakrishna, Vivekananda argued that there is no difference among the different systems of Vedanta such as Advaita, Dvaita, Dvaitadvaita, Suddhadvaita, etc. there should be no antagonism among these different paths of Vedanta philosophy; till the reaching of last end (Moksha) all the systems are complementary to each other. The last end is to attain the knowledge of Non-Dualism of the ultimate reality (Brahman)–'Tat tvam asi'. There is no difference between Brahman and Jiva (Atman). Vivekananda incorporated a new vision that in the spiritual life of an individual nothing is so great than merging with the whole. Knowledge of Non-duality is the essence of Vedanta philosophy.

In the Advaita Vedanta of Sankaracharya, though non-dualism is the main ideal, in practical life due to acceptance of "Adhikarbheda niti" the

difference among the men could not ignore; and that is why a Sudra people was not entitled to enter a shrine. Vivekananda minutely observed the difference between theory and practice in Sankaracharya's thought. He visualized it as a seer contradiction of Sankara's theory. Man is recognized as the "son of immortal" (Amritasya putra) in Indian philosophical tradition; therefore, there should be no difference among the man due to their birth. So he argued against casteism which helps in growing the problem of untouchability. He also pointed out the way of its eradication which is love.

Vivekananda had a very strong attraction towards the moral teachings of Buddha. He discovered newly the universal heart of Buddha in practical life in the light of Vedanta philosophy. The protests declared against casteism in the history religious movements of India Buddha has a prominent place as he vigorously declared equality of men through his teachings. Sankaracharya though acknowledged the equality of men in theory, in practical life he failed to show the universal heart full of love. So, Vivekananda had much more attraction towards teachings of Buddha than that of Sankaracharya and Vivekananda tried his best to synthesis the ideals of two great thinkers in his Neo-Vedantic philosophy. In his own thoughts, Buddha was—"the Breaker of Castes, destroyer of privileges preacher of equality of all beings."<sup>3</sup> Like Buddha, Vivekananda himself was overwhelmed by the sufferings of all beings, specially of men. He said that a person who sees Shiva (God) in the poor, in the weak and in the distressed really worships Shiva (God).

Vivekananda wanted to present the teachings of Vedanta to the common man in a simple and easy manner so that they may be inspired by those. For that he wanted to make free the Vedanta Philosophy from any kind of religious and metaphysical doctrine. Of course, question may be raised that if all those doctrines are disrobed from Vedanta will there remain anything worthwhile or not. Vivekananda opines that Vedanta philosophy is a system of philosophical thought full of scientific outlook tinged with psychological and moral elements.

Vivekananda could accomplish synthetic unity among the different systems Vedanta philosophy. According to him Dualism, Non-Dualism or qualified Non-dualism are the three ways of attaining knowledge of Non-

difference. For a general reader, the different systems of Vedanta are opposed to each other; for Vivekananda it is not real view of Vedanta philosophy. Dvaitavada, Advaitavada and Visistadvaita are the description of the same Absolute Reality, therefore, all are equally true. In his own terms—"one is good, other is better and again another may be best, but the word bad does not enter into the category of our religion."<sup>4</sup> According to him, the reason that the Absolute (Brahman) is described in different forms is the difference in the level of human mind. For a philosophy of Religion all these will have to be included to constitute comprehensive truth and satisfy all these different types of human mind. According to Vivekananda these three types of Vedanta philosophy are men's three levels of spiritual development.

Like Sankaracharya, Vivekananda admits that Brahman as the infinite Existence, Infinite Knowledge and Infinite Bliss is the only reality. Brahman is indeterminate, attributeless, beyond space, time and causality.

It is one and non-dual. There is no other existent things except Brahman. God, Nature, World nothing is existent, only an infinite existence is real where from different names and forms arises. He said that the waves of the sea is not different from the sea, difference only in name and form. Likewise, Brahman and jiva are non-different.

According to Vivekananda the nature of Brahman as indeterminate, attributeless entity is the knowledge received through negative perspective. He opines that in addition to negative perspective there is also a positive one. Viewed in the negative perspective the world is the creation of Maya. Maya is nothing but a cosmic ignorance, when ignorance disappears true knowledge dawns. According to Vivekananda, the world of things are not completely negated in the bosom of Brahman; in a special sense, all these things are true.

Thus Vivekananda's practical Vedanta is different in certain aspects from Sankara's Vedanta. Sankara's Vedanta philosophy is Metaphysical, other-worldly; on the otherhand, Vivekananda's Practical Vedanta is life oriented, action oriented. Vivekananda wanted to fulfill Sankara's philosophy. He argued that the concept of Maya in the Vedanta System does not indicate the non-existence or unreality of the world. Till the attainment of the true spiritual knowledge the world is quite real and

existent. If we suppose the world as self-existent, it is false; but if it is taken as the expression of the Brahman it is real. The world is not negated in Vedanta philosophy. In Vedanta philosophy the ideal of renunciation means viewing the object of the world as expression of God. He said, "The whole world is full of the Lord, open your eyes and see him. This is what Vedanta teaches."<sup>5</sup>

Vivekananda's vedantic thought exerted a spiritual movement which recognizes the divine nature in all kinds of being, high or low and helps in attracting human concentration for realization of the divine nature of man. He applied the Upanishadic wisdom in practical life to make a shift in the attitude of man's mind. His spiritual movement also achieved a lofty end which helped a lot in forming the conception of Indian Nationality among the depressed masses of India before independence.

In Vivekananda's interpretation of Vedanta, collective liberation gets much more emphasis than individual liberation. It is one of the great contributions of Vivekananda's thought.<sup>6</sup> He argued that when we consider all being to be one, in that case the concept of individual liberation is not acceptable; the actual liberation will be possible only when all are elevated. Vivekananda gave emphasis on the issue of material or economic development along with spiritual upliftment, as spiritual upliftment is directly related with economic well-being of man. For a starving man, worship of God is meaningless.

Vivekananda argues for the possibility of a universal religion which may help in bringing about social peace and harmony. He earnestly stressed on minimizing the apparent religious difference as it may pose as a threat to humanity, lead to hatred, indiscriminate killings and violence. He viewed all religions as essentially one. According to him, "universal religion about which philosophers and others have dreamed in every country already exists. It is here, if the priest and other people that have taken upon themselves the task of preaching different religions simply cease preaching for a few moments, we shall see it there."<sup>7</sup> According to Vivekananda, the root of violence in the name of religion is due to religious bigotry, sectarianism, fanaticism, which are like horrible demons, breakers of social peace and harmony.

Vivekananda is widely acknowledged as a world-class thinker

especially on Hindu Religion and Philosophy. His interpretation of Vedanta philosophy explores the universal human and spiritual values like love, compassion and non-violence which are regarded by the whole world as the potent tool for sustaining social peace and harmony. Pondering over the destruction of world war, Bertrand Russell asked a question—"Has man a future?" and in reference to the question Arnold Toynbee commented significantly as follows: "at this supremely dangerous moment in human history the only way of salvation for mankind is in the Indian way ... It is already becoming clear that a chapter which has a western beginning will have an Indian ending, if it is not ended in self-destruction of the human race... The emperor Ashoka's and Mahatma Gandhi's principle of non-violence and Sri Ramakrishna's testimony to the harmony of religions. Here we have the attitude and the spirit that can make it possible for the human race to grow together into a single family and in this Atomic Age, this is the only alternative to destroying ourselves."<sup>8</sup> The above quoted paragraph reflects the eternal relevance of Vivekananda's Vedantic thought and wisdom in reference to social peace and harmony.

#### References:

1. Sharma, Dr. Nilima, "Twentieth Century Indian Philosophy", 1999, Page-10.
2. Tezarananda, Swami,—"Swami Vivekananda and his Messages." Published in Swami Vivekananda Centenary Memorial Volume". Page-1563, editor, R.C. Majumdar.
3. Dutta, T.S. -"A study of Philosophy of Vivekananda", 1982, page-160 (Quoted from Complete works of Vivekananda, Vol-1, page 424-425, 14th Edition.)
4. Ibid - page 169.
5. Ibid - page 176
6. Ibid - page 181
7. Sen, Gautam, "The Mind of Swami Vivekananda, 2007, Page-21.
8. Ibid - page 156.