

Swamiji's Concept of Practical Vedanta

Prof. Gargi Medda

ABSTRACT

The Philosophy of Vivekananda owes its origin from the thoughts of Advaita, being inspired by Sri Rama Krishna, in such a way he accepts the theory, "Brahman alone is real, true all else is false. I am Brahman." Vivekananda says that reality is one absolute Brahman. He gives emphasis on monistic character of reality. Being a Neo-Vedantist, Vivekananda accepts Brahman as beyond space, time and causation. He recognized the energy of individual human as a form of divinity and built a tremendous positive psychology of human kind. His success lies in drawing social philosophy from the thoughts of Advaita Vedanta which paved the way for the social reforms in India. He encouraged the practice of Advaita Vedanta in people's daily life linked with society. He applied philosophy of Advaita Vedanta to build humanity and spirituality. It all reflected his practical Vedanta idealism.

Key Word: Vedanta.

Swami Vivekananda was an Indian Philosopher of Modern Times. He introduced Indian Philosophy of Vedanta and Yoga in the Western World. He was a major force in the reformation of Hindu religion in Indian. He began his search for God by following scientific approach, in the process of his quest, he met mystic Ramakrishna Paramhansa and became a great spiritualist of Neo-Vedanta. He encouraged the practice of Advaita Vedanta in people's daily life linked with society. According to Swamiji "Shankara left this Advaita Philosophy in the hills and forests, while of I have come to bring it out of those places and scatter it broadcast before the workaday world and society. The lion roar of Advaita must resound in every health and home, in meadows and groves, over hills and plains"⁽¹⁾ proclaims Swami Vivekananda. Swamiji's new approach of presenting Vedanta for the modern age is unique. He tried boldly to teach Advaita to everybody irrespective of caste, creed, race, religion, Swamiji said: "conceptions of the Vedanta must come out, must remain not only in the forest, not only in the cave, but they must come out to work at the bar and the bench, in the pulpit, and in the cottage of the poor man, with the fisherman that are catching fish, and with the students that are studying."⁽²⁾

According to Swami Vivekananda, practically is the only relevance to the Vedanta Philosophy.

Practicality means that it is high ideal and at the same time it is to be put into practice without any compromise. The actual should confirm to the ideal, the present life should be made to coincide with life eternal. The ideal of religion, according to Vedanta, must cover the whole field of life and must enter into all our thoughts and find expression in all our actions. It is to indicate this extreme practicality of Vedanta that many of the Upanishadic discourses are put in the mouths of ruling monarchs and not in those of priests. The great Vedantic text, the Bhagavat Gita was delivered in the field of battle by Sri Krishna to Arjuna. Therefore, the Vedanta is not only a high ideal but it can be put into practice without any compromise.

The essence of the Vedanta is the assertion of the divinity of man. The spirit in man is always pure and perfect. It is eternal. The Vedanta teaches men to have faith in themselves for the possession of the divinity. It is essential teaching according to Swami Vivekananda's words, is that "Each soul is potentially divine. The goal is to manifest this divinity within by controlling nature: external and internal. Do this either by work, or worship, or psychic control, or philosophy – by one, or more, or all of these – and be free, this is whole of religion. Doctrines, or dogmas or rituals, or books, or temples, or forms are but secondary details."⁽³⁾ The new approach not only declares that a human individual is divine, but also has daring faith in that divinity. Practical Vedanta is not just a philosophy but it is a guideline for robust living for being divine and also fully human.

The central ideal of Vedanta is oneness. According to Swamiji "There are no two in anything, no two lives. There is but one life, one world, one Existence, every thing is that one, the difference is in degree and not in kind".⁽⁴⁾ It is the same life that pulsates through all beings, from Brahma to the amoeba, the difference is only in the degree of manifestation. We must not look down with contempt on others but we should respect them. According to Swamiji "Vedanta can be carried into our everyday life, the city life, the country life, the national life, and the home life of every nation."⁽⁵⁾ A religion that cannot be put into practice, that cannot help man wherever he may be, is not of much use and value.

Religion, according to Vivekananda must provide men with strength and inspiration in all situations of life. The Vedantic teaching of faith in oneself is passed on the idea of one's inherent divinity. This faith is the best means for generating strength and inspiration. The Upanishadic teachers also followed the practical method of teaching. The early thinkers were practical first and philosophical next. The truth was not an intellectual theory but a lesson learnt

by the heat through every aspect of nature. This is one of the most important aspects of practical Vedanta. The theme of Vedanta is to see the Lord in everything, to perceive things in their real nature.

In the Vedanta a distinction is made between heaven and salvation. All heavens are transitory. The attainment of salvation is also not possible for those who are in Bramaloka, without knowledge. The persons who have realized the impersonal. Absolute need not worry about there destinies. They need not go anywhere. They recognizing their oneness with the impersonal God and they will not care whether it goes to hell or heaven. The impersonal God is a living God. According to Vedanta, the living God is within you. The only God to worship is the human soul in the human body. This impersonal conception will destroy the narrow and limited ideas of our mind. Universal love can spring in the heart only when we see the whole universe as one being and that each one's self is involved in the selves of all. And when we realize it then we are free from limitations of Karma and the bondage of nature.

The Vedanta admits that there are no two entities – only one exists. Only one entity is experienced at a time as changeless substratum or as changing attributes. It is illustrated with the help of the analogy of rope and snake. The rope stands for spirit or changelessness and the snake for the body or change. When the snake is seen the rope would have vanished and when the rope is seen the snake would have vanished. Applying this to ourselves, when we come to realize ourselves as the spirit the body would have vanished and when we are with body consciousness we are aware of the body only. This shows that whatever exists is one and that is appearing as there various forms.

Vedanta asks us to find God in ourself and worship the God. What is more practical than this? God is not a being far off. He is the self in you. It is through the self that you know anything. According to Swamiji without knowing Him we can neither live or move. We cannot breathe or live a second. Is it not preaching a practical God? We see the God inside me, outside me, before me, behind me, a God omnipresent, in every being and in every thing. We are to worship God in all men and women, in the young and the old, in the sinner and the saint, in the Brahmin and the pariah, in the poor, the sick, the ignorant, the destitute and the down trodden. According to Vedanta, serve them, worship them and that will be serving and worshipping the living God. "He who sees Shiva in the poor, in the weak, and in the diseased, really worships Shiva, and if he sees Shiva only in the image, his worship is but preliminary."⁽⁶⁾ We are really

serve them not help them.

Another important practical side of Swamiji's Neo Vedanta is acceptance, not mere tolerance, of other forms of worship. We should see others with eyes of love, with sympathy. The Advaita of Swami Vivekananda not only tolerates but accepts and respects other religions of would as but different paths that lead to the same goal-God.

The practice of Vedanta is usually called Yoga, a general name for the practical techniques by which the theoretical knowledge of the philosophy is realized. It helps to realize the immortality of the soul. The word 'Yoga' is normally associated with two kinds of meaning. It may mean union or a kind of discipline. Vivekananda incorporated both these meanings in his sense of the word Yoga. This the path leading to realization is the path of discipline and union. The new Vedanta regards the four Yogas – the paths of Jnana (knowledge), Bhakti (devotion), Karma (selfless action) and Raja (concentration).

Raja Yoga: Raja Yoga's aim is the realization of unity with God. It teaches concentration of the mind. This concentration alone can help him to gain knowledge and mastery of anything. Vivekananda says that, this method is not for the weak because it requires an immense faith in oneself. And it also requires physical and mental strength. The faith in oneself and the psychophysical strength gradually enable the Yogi to practice complete concentration leading to the realization of unity with the Divine. It is the way to the realization of immortality.

Karma Yoga: Karma Yoga teaches man to be unattached and work for work's sake. A Karma Yogi works because it is his nature to work. He has no object beyond work. His position in this world is that of a giver. Karma Yogi never cares to receive anything in return. According to Vivekananda, continuous selfless work enables a man to rise above his self and to have a feeling of oneness with everything. Through selfless work one's mind becomes pure and he is able to identify himself with all. This is the realization of immortality.

Bhakti Yoga: The path of devotion to God for realization is called Bhakti Yoga. Bhakti Yoga is the path of systematized devotion for the attainment of union with the absolute. Bhakti Yoga requires real, genuine and ceaseless love towards God to achieve the supreme identity. This is the way of knowing God through the intensity of feeling. Strong emotions have the capacity to awaken and activate the potential powers of man.

Jnana Yoga: Jnana Yoga, the way of knowledge is based on the realization that bondage is due

to ignorance. Ignorance is the inability to distinguish between the real and the unreal. This lack of discrimination is ignorance. Therefore knowledge has to be discriminatory. Knowledge must have an awareness of the distinction between the real and the unreal. Jnana Yoga is the path for self-realization through discrimination. According to Vivekananda renunciation is a necessary stage in the practice of Jnana Yoga. Renunciation helps the Jnana Yogi to meditate upon the true nature of self. After the renunciation, concentration can be practised. In course of time, this concentration will become intenser. In this stage the individual may attain the stage of complete concentration on Samadhi. When the individual is in Samadhi, he knows no distinction between the self and Brahman and he will have the realization of oneness.

Vedanta in the hands of Vivekananda becomes as instrument for revitalizing and regulating India by the masses strong, self-reliant and great. In the Philosophy of Vivekananda, contemplation and activity, Nirvakalpa Samadhi and humanitarians work, God and the world run parallel to each other. Neither spirituality is abandoned nor social service is neglected but they are synthesized. His philosophy is vedantic based on the beliefs that God alone is real, that man is God in himself, and that this realization of divinity in oneself and others is the goal of life. Vivekananda refused to believe that Vedanta is theoretical and held that it is practical. So, we must be able to carry it out in every part of our lives.

References:

1. Complete works of Swami Vivekananda, AdvaitaAshrama, Kolkata 1989, Vol. VII, P 162.
2. Ibid, Vol III, 1989, Page, 245.
3. Vivekananda: The Yogas and other Works, Chosen and with a biography by Swami Nikhilananda (New York: Rama Krishna-Vivekananda Centre, 1984), P-113.
4. Complete works of Swami Vivekananda, AdvaitaAshrama, Kolkata, Vol. II, 2009, P-297.
5. Ibid, Vol-II, 2009, P-342.
6. Ibid, Vol-II, 2009, P-372.