

Swami Vivekananda : The Great Social and Religious Reformer

Dr. Santosh Yadav

Asstt. Prof. of Political Science

Dyal Singh College, Karnal

Abstract

Swami Vivekanand was one of the greatest and towering personalities of india. He has been hailed as the monk of india. His role in the growing Indian nationalism cannot be underestimated in the context of nineteenth and twentieth century as he reinterpreted various aspects including education, faith, character building and last, but not the least, social issues related to various aspects of indian culture. He was also the force behind introducing the concept of yoga to West. He was a strong advocate of the idea that the future of a country depends on its people and he believed in “man-making is my mission.” According to him, religion plays a significant role in man-making. This idea, he thinks, should be manifested in every walk of life.

Key-words: Humanism, Saint, Education, Religion, Philosohy.

Paper

It is an established fact that Swami Vivekananda was a great social reformer as well as a very inspiring personality of India. The greatness of any person is determined by his actions done to his society and how much time he has devoted to complete those actions. Swami Vivekananda was the brightest star of the Indian Renaissance during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. While Swami ji strongly opposed the caste system and supported idol worship, he emphasized on the promotion of education by realizing it as the utmost need of the hour. His ideas of eradicating untouchability are noteworthy. He worked continuously in this direction and struggled a lot to change the ideology of people. Like Mahatma Gandhi, Swami Vivekananda was an ardent follower of the path of non-violence and truth. In his Vedanta, he has preached the message of eternal truth. Swami Vivekananda had a vision to build a complete India with unity and goodwill based on the foundation of religion without discrimination. Swami Vivekananda was a great patriot who dedicated his life for the service of his motherland. But, he

did not allow his love for India to limit his love for humanity as he loved and treated all human beings as equal irrespective of caste, religion, race, nationality or gender. He was the symbol of national unity as well as a great social reformer.

Social and Religious Reforms of Swami Vivekanand :

Swami Vivekananda opposed caste system in his social views. Initially, Indian society was divided into a system based on karma, but gradually this varna system changed into the caste system. He believed that the caste system can be demolished only when we believe in the superiority and ability of individuals. Swami Vivekananda used to consider the caste system as deadly for both country and society as he preached the idea that by spreading civilization and education, discrimination on the basis of caste can be eradicated. He was of the notion that we cannot only save the lower classes by educating them, but also it will be a step in the direction of true national service. Swami Vivekananda believed in every human being as a part of God, and on the basis of this perception, he strongly opposed religious discrimination. Religious discrimination was prevalent in India in the nineteenth century, and Swami Vivekananda put the idea of

global religion in front of the world by projecting the concept of spiritual values in front of the materialistic people of the West. Swami ji emphasized the idea of world religion in which all human beings in the world can be gathered by breaking the boundaries of country and time. In his opinion, we must accept all religions and respect them.

Swami Vivekananda was an advocate and firm supporter of idol worship. In the beginning, he was an atheist, but later on, after becoming a disciple of Swami Ramakrishna Paramahansa, he became a believer. He was critical of the social reformers of that time who opposed idol worship. Swami ji thought that the complete devotion to God is possible in the heart of a clear idol of God. He considered idol worship paves the way for the process of spiritual development. Swami Vivekananda strongly believed education as the founding stone for any nation. He did not find the education system of that time adequate because it was not working in the direction of building the character of man, whereas the goal of education should be the creation of life character. According to Swami ji, in the current education system, students are not taught anything about their

civilization and culture. That is why, he strongly advocated the system of education based on Gurukul method instead of the prevailing education system. Swami ji had laid great emphasis on the study of religious texts and philosophy in the curriculum. He thought education essential for the all-round development of the underprivileged sections who were being deprived of education from ancient times. He laid emphasis on free and compulsory education for the poor. According to him, to be educated was not just about gaining degrees, but also positive change of soul. While Swami ji, on the one hand, strongly criticized western culture and westernization, but on the other hand, he also supported western education. During his stay in America and Europe, he realized that the secret to the advancement of the Western culture is education system based on scientific logic. The scientific education system changed the thinking of the people of the society there. Although this education has been far from spirituality, it was praised by Swami ji for adopting scientific approach. Swami ji was a realistic person, so he felt that along with Vedanta, scientific education should also be imparted to the people. He preached the message that the life progress is good

and the human should walk accordingly, they should weigh each thing on the scales of logic and science.

Swami ji has strongly opposed untouchability in his social views. He thought untouchability as the major obstacle in establishing social equality in society. The upper class people did not want to have any kind of contact with the lower class people. Swami ji was the first to speak for the poor and the down-trodden masses who found untouchability as the stigma of society and he is strongly opposed to it. He stressed on the upliftment of women in their social ideas. He strongly believed that only by respecting women in the society india can progress in all spheres. According to him, in countries where females are not respected, nation cannot attain prosperity and development. he was also against child marriage as it hinders the growth of a girl child. Due to child marriage, the physical and mental development of the girls was not possible. In the nineteenth century, he strongly believed that child marriage was the root cause of the miserable situation of widows.

Swami ji strongly favoured the study of Vedas. Vedic tradition and Vedanta occupy an important place in Swami ji's philosophy.

He did not support any kind of treaty with such persons who did not have any information about the Vedas. Swami Ji founded the Vedanta Society for the study and propagation of the Vedas. He did not consider Vedanta a subject of spiritual practice of Brahmins or Sannyasis but it proved the key to family and social life. He strongly believed that the knowledge of the whole world is contained in the Vedas.

Swami ji has laid great emphasis on the notion of renunciation and service in his thoughts. Prior to him, the saints and Mahatmas had only emphasized renunciation and had not given much emphasis in the matter of service. His main motive behind the establishment of the Ramakrishna Mission was to serve poor people. Swami ji inspired his supporters to leave the sadistic practice of studying the Vedas and joining the service of those people who were helpless. He strongly believed in the idea that only by serving such people can we attain God. The kind of power that Swami ji wanted to provide his countrymen not only physical power, but also the power of character. That is why, he supported such education system which emphasizes on human character building. The goal of education should be to build life

as well as to build character. Swami ji was of the view that only by means of education a nation can develop in in real sense of words. When proper force is produced in the soul through proper education, then no kind of oppression or pressure can stand in front of it. Swami ji has developed a system of education based on the Gurukul method instead of the Western education system for the formation of character, which emphasizes religious tolerance as well as on character formation.

Swami ji, in his speeches and writings, had laid great emphasis on International Humanism. Swamiji had addressed the gathering at the Chicago Religion Conference as sisters and brothers, and his aim behind it was international humanism. Although Swami ji had given his ideas of nationalism, but when he realized that the idea of nationalism was a threat to the human race, he also supported international humanism. He wanted to make India great and powerful to serve the entire human race. Swami Vivekananda was an ardent follower of Vedic religion and had deep faith in Vedic religion. According to Swami ji, Vedic religion is definitely the best in the world. In keeping with the goal of human welfare, Swami ji had presented a

practical interpretation of the Vedas to create awareness about human values in humans.

Swami ji's ideas of world unity and human development are possible only through Vedanta religion. According to him, Veda is not only the subject of study of Brahmins, but it is the key to family and social life. He also opined that Vedanta is the weapon for the upliftment of the person and the formation of society and coordination of the nation. Through Ramakrishna Mission, Vivekananda tried to serve whole mankind which was established at Belur in 1899. This mission preached Vedantic philosophy and created new spiritual awakening in the heart of the people. Besides, it carried on philanthropic works at the time of flood, famine, earthquake, cyclone, epidemics and other natural calamities. It was by the effort of Vivekananda that this mission spread its branches not only in India but also in America, Germany, England, Switzerland and other countries. Sister Nivedita accompanied him to popularize the activities of this mission in the European countries. At present, the Ramakrishna Mission is regarded as a popular philanthropic association in the world.

Swami Vivekananda considered religion to be the basis of politics as he thought that there is a close relationship between religion and politics. But, the Western thinkers do not support this idea at all. Swami Vivekananda did not favour the views the West on ideas related to religion and politics. His idea was that in a country where religion is separated from politics, violence in politics is likely to take place. He was an advocate of the view that religion makes politics sacred. Swami Vivekananda is known for his inspiring speech at the Parliament of the World's Religions at Chicago on 11 September, 1893, where he introduced Hindu philosophy to the west, but this was not the only contribution of this saint. He revealed the true foundations of India's unity as a nation. He taught how a nation with such a vast diversity can be bound together by a feeling of humanity and brother-hood.

Vivekananda supported the idea of religious tolerance. He taught the text of religious tolerance through his various speeches not only to Indians, but also to the other people of the world. Through the concept of religious tolerance, he believed, we will be able to maintain respect for all religions. Religious

tolerance should be the religion of every human being as he wanted to build a nation by getting the support of all the religions. Swami Vivekananda had strongly supported truth and non-violence in his philosophy. In his Vedanta, he has spoken of eternal truth. Swami Vivekananda had the vision of a complete India in which there will be no discrimination on the basis of religion.

To conclude, we can say that Swami Vivekananda was a social reformer and religious personality of India. He tried to coordinate the cultures of East and West, and did not hesitate to accept the good things of the West. While presenting the concept of global religion to the people, he also stressed on the upliftment of the lowest classes of society. Swami Vivekananda was the founder of socialism in India. Swami Vivekananda had the idea that the role of spiritual tradition would be of great importance in the formation of a healthy India, so he emphasized the concept of revival of Hinduism which is incomparable.

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