

Nidān

THE JOURNAL
OF THE
DEPARTMENT
OF
HINDU STUDIES

UNIVERSITY OF DURBAN-WESTVILLE

Vol. 5

December 1993

Nidān

Journal of the Department of Hindu Studies

University of Durban-Westville

Volume 5

December 1993

EDITORIAL BOARD

Prof T S Rukmani

Dr A Sooklal

CONSULTANT EDITORS

Prof K Haraksingh, University of West Indies, Trinidad

Prof K Mishra, Benares Hindu University, India

Prof LN Sharma, Benares Hindu University, India

Prof KL Sheshagiri Rao, University of Virginia, USA

Nidān is the Journal of the Department of Hindu Studies, University of Durban-Westville. The Journal, published annually, is devoted to the study of Hindu religion, philosophy and culture. The Editorial Board considers for publication articles that have not previously appeared or been submitted simultaneously elsewhere. Scholarly contributions of up to 6000 words on topics of contemporary significance in the academic study of Hinduism are invited. All articles will be subject to evaluation by the Editorial Board and independent referees drawn from the Consultant Editors.

Views expressed do not necessarily represent those of the Editorial Board, the Consultant Editors or the Department of Hindu Studies.

Articles published in Nidān have abstracts reflected in Ulrich's International Periodicals-Directory, New Jersey, USA, also in Periodica Islamica, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia as well as the Index to South African Periodicals.

Subscription Rates – One issue per year:

Southern Africa: R5.00 • Elsewhere US\$5.00

ISSN 1016 – 5320

Published and printed by

The University of Durban-Westville
Private Bag X54001 Durban 4000

CONTENTS

	Page
Swami Vivekananda's Neo-Vedantic Universalism : Its relevance for the reconstruction of South African Society <i>Nelistra Singh</i>	5
Metaphysical and ethical principles in Swami Vivekananda's thought <i>J G Desai</i>	17
The Neo-Vedanta philosophy of Swami Vivekananda <i>Anil Sooklal</i>	33
Swami Vivekananda's impact on Indian history <i>S Rajamani</i>	51

Dedication

This Volume of Nidān is dedicated to
Swami Vivekananda,
commemorating his dynamic impact
at the Parliament of World Religions
held in Chicago, USA in September 1893.

Invitation

Submission of books pertaining to Hinduism and Indian culture for review in Nidan is invited. New titles, both for mention and review purposes, should be forwarded to Dr A Sooklal.

Contributions and related correspondence should be sent to:

Dr Anil Sooklal
Department of Hindu Studies
University of Durban-Westville
Private Bag X54001
Durban 4000
South Africa

SWAMI VIVEKANANDA'S NEO-VEDANTIC UNIVERSALISM : ITS RELEVANCE FOR THE RECONSTRUCTION OF SOUTH AFRICAN SOCIETY

Nelistra Singh*

INTRODUCTION

The idea that one often forms about Swami Vivekananda from the vast literature on him is that of a purely religious leader, devoted fully to the service of God and the propagation of Vedantic Hinduism. However, there is nothing more erroneous. The brief but brilliant life of Swami Vivekananda was full of ardent, varied social activity. Although the outer expression of his activity was the formal affiliation to the monastic order of his guru, Sri Ramakrishna, first as an ordinary *sanayasi*, and then as its leader, the radical content of the life and work of Swami Vivekananda consisted not in service to religion only but in service for his homeland and his concern for global harmony.

From the very first step of his conscious life right up to his untimely death in 1902, he, though bearing the spiritual title of Swami, never kept himself confined to a monastic ashram, meditating in seclusion on God. He unified the whole of India, and kept in close and direct contact with the life of the masses (Litman 1987 : 148).

EAST-WEST HARMONY

The dynamic impact which Swami Vivekananda had at the World Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1893 resulted in the relatively unknown Hindu monk blossoming into a world figure. He became the prophet of harmony and peace and of East-West unity. This sentiment was echoed in his address at the final session of the Parliament one hundred years ago where he stated (Ranganathananda 1988 : 22):

* Department of Science of Religion, University of Durban-Westville

If the Parliament of religions has shown anything to the world, it is this: It has proved to the world that holiness, purity, and charity are not the exclusive possession of any church in the world and that every system has produced men and women of the most exalted character. In the face of this evidence, if anybody dreams of the exclusive survival of his own religion and of the destruction of the others, I pity him from the bottom of my heart, and point out to him that upon the banner of every religion will soon be written, in spite of his resistance: "Help and not Fight, Assimilation and not destruction, Harmony and Peace and not Dissension".

The dynamism of Swami Vivekananda's message of universal harmony can be seen in that his concern for humankind transcended geographical and national borders. True to the spirit of the Vedic injunction "*Vasudaiva Kutumbakam*" – The whole world is one family – Vivekananda's quest for East-West unity and global re-spiritualization was projected on a worldwide scale. The life and teachings of both his guru, Sri Ramakrishna, and Swami Vivekananda signified not only a new awakening of the national consciousness of India but also the new spirit of love, fellowship and understanding that was growing among the different sections of humanity on the basis of their spiritual oneness.

Out of the nine years of his public ministry, from the Parliament of Religions in 1893 up to his death in 1902, he devoted over four intense years to the West. The intensity of his nine years of work in America, Europe and in India, the output of spiritual, intellectual, literary, and organisational work, aside from the travelling included during the period, is unprecedented. As a teacher of modern India and as her cultural and spiritual Emissary to the West, Vivekananda has illumined the horizon of national and international life, which has no parallel in world history. He was a man with a message and he delivered it fearlessly and intensely. His philosophy of comprehensive spirituality will enkindle the spiritual growth of humanity everywhere and could provide the catalyst to develop a 'humanitarian consciousness' in all nations (Ranganathananda 1988 : 30) marking the fulfilment of the advent of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda in the modern age.

NOE-VEDANTIC PARADIGMS FOR NATION BUILDING

An examination of Swami Vivekananda's Neo-Vedantic philosophy and its emphasis on universalism, harmony, humanism and nation building provides many paradigms for the re-spiritualization and reconstruction of South Africa. South African society at the present moment stands on the

threshold of one of the most important periods of its eventful history as it moves towards a democratic, non-racial, non-sexist society in an attempt to free itself from the dehumanising forces of apartheid. Apartheid has destroyed the equality of South Africans, as well as their right to make choices and to determine their own destiny. Racial discrimination and disregard for the freedom, the physical and mental integrity and the dignity of individuals and groups resulted in tremendous humiliation and suffering. The psychological and sociological disruption caused by forced removals, influx control, migrant labour pass law arrests, has damaged extensively the psyche of the South African masses. The majority of people were denied equal education, and many were denied any education at all. Black property rights, language rights, housing, employment, medical care, social activity to name but a few, were areas where rights were violated and trampled on. Constitutionally the majority of South Africans have been excluded from any meaningful participation in democratic processes and certainly from electing their Government (van der Westhuizen 1991 : 474).

Thus at this present moment South Africa stands at a crucial juncture of its history. Given the history of its past our's is not the easiest of all situations to handle; obstacles in the way to a democratic future for South Africa are formidable. Numerous sectors of society have the unenviable task of examining their roles in the rebuilding of a new South Africa. It is a challenge weighing heavily on the conscience of all its people. The dynamics of this responsibility need to be examined, and responses, both theoretical and action orientated, need to be formulated. This process has to be a holistic and multi-dimensional, encompassing all facets of South African society – the social, political, economic and religio-cultural. South Africans have been guided by a new vision in this process of reconstruction of the emergent new nations. It is important to note that independence does not signal the end of the struggle but rather the dawn of an ongoing renewed vision; a vision of liberation, realism and praxies. Further, the visionary idealism postulated must be transformed into an active realism, a nation-building realism.

It is precisely this emphasis on active realism which lays at the basis of the Neo-Vedanta philosophy of Swami Vivekananda as an effective mechanism which encourages individual freedom and selfless activity on the part of the individual and social equality and oneness in society (Reddy, 1984 : 19). The beginning of Neo-Vedanta, as a restatement of Vedanta to adjust itself to modern challenges of the scientific and technological age, may be traced back to the Vedas and Upanishads. Vivekananda's Neo-Vedanta and its

practical, active application to all facets of society, political, social, economic, religious provides us with a unitary vision of a holistic society where the secular and spiritual are taken cognizance of.

In speaking of a new future and a new vision of reconstruction the question of apartheid has been responsible for de-humanising the majority of South African society; the psychological scar has struck deep over many centuries into the very soul of its people. The need for a culture of humanism to ensure a social order upholding the glory of humanity, its freedom, equality and dignity is a fundamental responsibility that needs to be addressed with immediacy.

HUMANISTIC IDEOLOGIES – UNITY OF LIFE

One of the greatest contributions of Swami Vivekananda is the development of humanistic ideologies. The voice of Vivekananda at the end of the 19th century resounded loudly in his own country where human rights were trampled underfoot and brutally exploited. The qualitative humanism played an important role in the general upsurge of National consciousness and the struggle of India for independence. Vivekananda's ideal of humanism is an active humanism, it is a fervent desire to elevate humanity, a sense of responsibility for his own destiny and the destiny of all people, to make him strive for the ideals of good, truth and justice, to foster in humanity a hatred for any suffering (Chelishv 1987 : 209).

The philosophy of humanism is based on Oneness, the unity of life, the central ideal of Neo-Vedanta. The Divine Brahman (God), is the source and cause of all life. God is present in and pervades the entire created world, the entire cosmos is endowed with a special sanctity. It is the indwelling or the abiding of the Lord as the very Self of all beings which constitutes and forms the basis of the dignity and worth of human person in the Hindu perspective:

I am the Self (Atman), seated in the hearts of all beings. I am the beginning, the middle and also the end of all beings (Bhagavad Gita 10.30).

The vision is one of every human being as the abode of the highest reality; in and through every living being we are called upon to perceive and worship God. The implication of this vision is an identification with all beings at the most profound level. It is an identity that transcends all relative differences of ethnicity, culture, nationality. The attainment of spiritual freedom

involves the gain of a knowledge revealing the essential unity of all life. Hence Vivekananda's Neo-Vedanta not only subscribes to a common brotherhood of humanity but transcends this concept and speaks of the unity of all existence. In terms of human relationships the moral consequence of this vision can only be that I treat all beings as I would treat myself. The general obligation of each human being is to consider the interest and welfare of every other human being as his or her own. Love for life in all its diversity and variety is the spontaneous attitude of this outlook of unity and identity (Rambachan 1984 : 4–5).

It is this vision of the unity of all life which Vivekananda elevated as the directing force of his philosophy. According to Swami Vivekananda (1985 : 15) the only God to worship is the human soul in the human body. In his desire to elevate humanity, Vivekananda put forward the idea that the highest divine substance – Brahman – is personified in millions of ordinary living people and therefore the worship of God is tantamount to serving humanity. There is a need for the all round development of the oppressed human personality and the assertion of the individual's right to freedom and happiness in this country. In re-humanising South African society the oppressed masses have to be first and foremost imbued with a sense of their own dignity and worth. The development of a qualitative new humanism must play an important part in the upsurge of a new national consciousness (Sooklal 1993 : 64).

Since the new South Africa seems to be moving towards democracy, a humanistic interpretation of the essence of humanity will largely determine the democratic nature of the new nation. Vivekananda, ever mindful of the suffering and misfortune of the masses states (Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda, Vol 5, 1985 : 152):

The great national sin is the neglect of the masses and this is one of the causes of our downfall.... They are practically our slaves. If we want to regenerate our country, we must work for them.

The poverty and suffering of the masses wrung the heart of Vivekananda throughout his life; even amidst the opulence of America he was overcome with emotion and he cried (Ranganathananda 1988 : 23).

'O Mother, what do I care for name and fame when my motherland remains sunk in utmost poverty'. To what a sad pass have we poor Indians come when millions of us die for want of a handful of rice.... Who will raise the masses.... Who will give them bread? Show me, O Mother, how can I help them.

For Vivekananda it is not the God in temples and places of worship that we are to worship only; we are to worship the living God, whom we see before us and who is in everything we see. We are to worship God in all men and women, in the young and the old, in the sinner and the saint, especially the poor, the sick, the ignorant, the destitute, and the downtrodden, for the God in them wants our worship, our care and service. Neo-Vedanta states that it is the greatest privilege to serve the Lord in all these shapes; (Thus spoke Vivekananda, 1975 : 73 74):

He who sees Siva in the poor, in the weak, and in the diseased, really worships Siva, and if he sees Siva only in the image, his worship is but preliminary. He who has served and helped one poor man seeing Siva in him, without thinking of his caste, or creed or race, or anything, with him Siva is more pleased than with the man who sees Him only in temples.

This level of commitment for the masses is a worthy lesson for us to learn in our process of reconstruction. Furthermore Vivekananda looked upon society as a unity wherein different aspects of life are closely knit. A human being according to this outlook, is an undivided whole and therefore every department of life viz. ethics, politics, religion and economics are different facets of one reality. Each one has to become sanctified since political equality cannot be attained amidst social inequality. Vivekananda's philosophy emphasizes the deep spiritual relationship between the individual and society. Society is a partnership not in power or wealth but in the production of spiritual perfection. His service orientated philosophy is based on the individual identifying himself with the community and serving it selflessly without any motive for personal gain (complete Works of Vivekananda, Vol 4, 1985 : 463).

The individual's life is in the life of the whole, the individual's happiness is in the happiness of the whole, apart from the whole, the individual's existence is inconceivable Δ this is an eternal truth and is the bed-rock on which the universe is built.

Vivekananda's humanistic and egalitarian philosophy places a moral imperative on individuals in society to work for the happiness, the upgrading of the welfare of all, the oppressed, exploited and tyrannised. This is based on promoting freedom and the equality of all; since his concept of equality fosters fellowship and unity among individuals and nations. In South Africa, his message for the upliftment of the masses through selfless service and the moral responsibility on all individuals in society to concretize this vision in a qualitative way is imperative.

MULTIDIMENSIONAL RECONSTRUCTION

An important point that Vivekananda emphasized that has significance in South Africa is that one cannot attain spiritual freedom if one is politically in chains. The ultimate aim of the human soul is freedom from bondage. Vivekananda's view of Moksha, spiritual freedom, presupposes social and political liberty. He considers freedom to be all inclusive and points out that the denial or exclusion of any aspect of freedom, whether religious, or social, or political hinders individual and social growth (Complete Works of Vivekananda, Vol 5, 1955 : 212):

To advance towards freedom – physical, mental and spiritual – and help others to do so is the supreme prize of man. Those social rules which stand in the way of the unfoldment of this freedom are injurious and steps should be taken to destroy them speedily.

In Neo-Vedanta the perfection of the society has its foundational postulate in the perfection of the individual. Rights are essential for the realization of individual perfection. The assertion of human rights is not an example of mere egoistic excess but it is the concrete expression of the divine instinct of liberty. The rights of the human being are claimed for the full development of the individual and the society. For the growth of South Africa to its full potential in terms of the sacred and the secular, this idea is very relevant in that change and reconstruction has to be multi dimensional. Spiritual freedom cannot be seen as isolated since political freedom is a necessity for the progression of the entire society.

RELIGIOUS PLURALISM – UNIVERSALISTIC APPROACH

South Africa is a country with high levels of religious affiliation and activity. Given South Africa's political history, religion is much more socially and politically influential and has had to take on the role in a sense of the culture of resistance in the fight for political freedom. In the process of reconstruction religion will remain a powerful personal and social reality. Furthermore South Africa represents a multi-religious spectrum of belief systems including African traditionalists, ecclesiastical Christian (meaning Christians in church bodies which formed in Europe and took root there more or less unchanged), African Independent Christian Churches, Hindu, Muslims, Jewish, Buddhist and many smaller groupings ranging from Bahai to Zoroastrian (Prozesky, 1991 : 2).

The question that arises is how to effect a greater unity that we have ever had before in a religiously plural society. In South Africa the situation is

problematic in context since apartheid in South Africa with its racist, exploitative and dehumanizing structures were given religious legitimacy by the most influential of the country's Christian churches. Thus apartheid has to a significant extent been the product of explicitly religious forces, though obviously it also derives from secular sources as well (Prozesky 1991 : 61).

As a solution to this problem Swami Vivekananda's vision of the universalism of all religion can be posited. Swami Vivekananda, basing his teaching on the experiences of his Master, Sri Ramakrishna, postulated Neo-Vedanta as accepting, not mere tolerating other forms of worship. Truth is nobody's property, no race, no individual can lay any exclusive claim to it. Truth is the nature of all souls (Complete Works of Vivekananda, Vol 2, 1983), Swami Vivekananda states:

All religions are different forces in the economy of God, working for the good of mankind. We Hindus do not merely tolerate, we unite ourselves with every religion, praying in the mosque of the Muslim, worshipping before the fire of the Zoroastrian, kneeling to the cross of the Christian. Religions are but so many attempts of the human soul to grasp and realise the infinite. So we gather all these flowers, and binding them together with the cord of love, make them into a wonderful bouquets of worship.

Neo-Vedanta not only tolerates but accepts and respects other religions of the world as but different paths that lead to the same goal-God. To the heart of Vivekananda none was foreign or alien since everyone was looked upon with this universalism, the religion of love; for him there existed only Humanity and Truth.

This universalistic approach of respect for the belief systems of individuals could positively help in the reconstructive process in South Africa. The separation of people in the past led to an ignorance of one another; the degree of ignorance about religion and culture is immense. Ignorance is not bliss, it is the foundation for exploitability, vulnerability and deception; and is completely incompatible with the working of a truly democratic state (Prozesky 1991 : 5). What we need to engender is a living appreciate of the faiths of others, a healthy respect and understanding to help us live in harmony and peace in a new South Africa.

EDUCATION

The right to a proper education needs to be addressed urgently in the rehumanising process. Education is viewed by Vivekananda as one of the

most potent liberating forces. One of the greatest handicaps facing South African society today is the lack of proper education for the masses. A future Bill of Rights has to ensure that every South African has the right to proper education in an attempt to raise the condition of the masses. Education must be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedom. Vivekananda, in this regard, sees education as both secular and spiritual. Instead of a structure of education concentrating only on secular subjects thus creating an imbalance he encourages the spiritual dimension to be taken cognisance of. A future national education policy ought to be structured around human rights values in South Africa.

POSITION OF WOMEN

The position of women, whose human rights in South Africa have been held captive and compounded by politics, social customs and religious dicta, will have to be examined in the process of reconstruction. Gender oppression has to be seriously analyzed and researched, and seriously struggled against, through all stages of the liberation movement. For South Africa, this issue becomes crucial as we move towards a transitional phase to democracy (Mtintso 1991 : 1). Swami Vivekananda held extremely strong views about the positive role of women. The cry that incessantly rose to his lips indicated the level of his concern about women's issues:

Never forget....the word is Women and the People.... The uplift of the women, the awakening of the masses, must come first, and then only can any real good come about for the country.... Women are not weak, nor ignorant....just the contrary. But they lack opportunities, they lack training....give them both, give them all. (Complete Works of Vivekananda, Vol 6, 1985 : 445).

In tune with his doctrine of equality and liberty for all, Swami Vivekananda's views regarding the upliftment of women manifests clearly this holistic Vedantic spirit of unity and practicality. He advocates full individual freedom for men and women equally; he also holds that as social beings, their responsibility and dharma or duty is for the construction of a harmonious society based on social, economic and political stability.

YOUTH

The youth of our country have been disillusioned. Youth, a time in our lives that is supposed to be a celebration of life and joy and idealism has been in

South Africa for the Black youth a baptism of fire. Youth is synonymous with the destiny of a people, of a nation and of the world, as it is they who carry the present into the future; they can make it or mar it. Fully understanding this, it has been emphasized by Swami Vivekananda that 'Nation-building' should start with 'humanity making', more precisely with youth-making. He had great faith in the youth (Complete Works of Vivekananda, Vol III, 303 304):

My faith is in the younger generation, the modern generation.... A hundred thousand men and women, fortified with eternal faith in the Lord, and moved to courage by their sympathy for the poor and the fallen and the down-trodden, will go over the length and breadth of the land, preaching the gospel of help, the gospel of social raising up – the gospel of equality.

South African youth, as victims of the dehumanizing processes of apartheid as well as the social processes of secularization, westernization, industrialization resulting in the break up of the family systems were left with no spiritual, parental or social rudder. In the reconstruction and rehumanising process youth should be motivated by strong, enobling and unifying ideals striving towards which they would integrate their personalities and transform themselves. Only if such a possibility is open to them, since the scars run very deep, would they find their lives fulfilled – energy, well channelised and utilised, idealism set in the right direction and their hopes, aspirations, ambitions and dreams reaching near fulfilment.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion it is imperative to point out that the debate on reconstruction and rehumanisation has several dimensions and this paper only provides some reflections on the concepts of liberty and equality as found in Swami Vivekananda's Neo-Vedantic world view and its relevance to South African society. In a society torn apart by apartheid and dehumanised by the culture of violence Swami Vivekananda's vision of a spiritualized society based on love, selflessness, active humanism, oneness of vision and the unity of life presents a positive paradigm to practically assist the process of reconstruction. In terms of this ideal the aim is the creation of a society in which the dignity and worth of the human being will be established and maintained as part of the realization of the essential unity of all life. The value of a human rights ethic seeks to ensure equal opportunities and privileges to all in society so that they may develop fully both the outer as well as inner self. The call of Swami Vivekananda for humanity in the east and west to live in accordance

with a heightened sense of the higher consciousness to inaugurate such societies based on freedom, dignity and liberty of individuals is profoundly significant. His inspirational words just before he died were:

I shall not cease to work. I shall inspire men everywhere, until the world shall know that it is one with God.

Verily his reassuring words have proven true, since with the passing of time his message of love, peace and goodwill has been gathering momentum and securing from day to day a firm foothold in the citadel of human thought and action (Tejasananda Swami 1963 : 33).

Swami Vivekananda's total reliance on the power of God, of His love, His authority, His all abiding concern for humanity can be the flame to light the fire of a culture of hope in a South Africa where almost 99% of its people are religious (Nurnberger, 1991 : 3):

We have a vision
It won't be easy
But empowered by God
we can succeed.

REFERENCES

- Chelishhev, E.P., 1987, "Swami Vivekananda – The Great Indian", in *Swami Vivekananda Studies in Soviet Union, Calcutta* : The Ramakrishna Institute of Culture.
- Lakshmi Kumari, M., 1986, "*The Necessity for an Ideal for Youth*", in *The Jyothi*, South Africa, Ramakrishna Centre of South Africa.
- Litman, 1987, "Swami Vivekananda's Ideas of Enlightenment" in *Swami Vivekananda Studies in Soviet Union, Calcutta* : The Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Calcutta.
- Mintso, T., 1991, "Politics and Women's Rights", in *The contribution of South African Religions in the coming South Africa*. South Africa, University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg.
- Nurnberger, K., 1991, *A Democratic Vision for South Africa*, South Africa, Encounter Press.
- Prozesky, M., 1992, "Proposals for a Criteriology of Religion, in *Journal for the Study of Religion*, Vol. 5, No. 1, March 1992.

- Prozesky, M., 1991, "Religion in the Old South Africa and the New : The Broad Picture", in *The contribution of South African Religions to the coming South Africa*. South Africa, University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg.
- Rambachan, A., 1984, "The rejection of racism : An Analysis from the Advaita Vedanta Tradition of Hinduism". Unpublished paper, University of Leeds.
- Ranganathananda Swami, 1988, *Swami Vivekananda, India's Emissary to the West*. Durban, The Ramakrishna Centre of South Africa.
- Reddy, A.V.R., 1984, *The Political Philosophy of Swami Vivekananda*, New Delhi. Sterling Publications, 1984.
- Sooklal, A., 1983, "Hinduism and the Re-humanising of South African Society", in *Journal for the Study of Religion*, Vol. 6, No. 1, Association for the Study of Religion.
- Sooklal, A., 1992, "Neo-Vedanta and Human Rights", in *Studies in Sikhism and Comparative Religion*. New Delhi, Guru Nanak Foundation.
- Tejasananda Swami, 1963, Swami Vivekananda and His Message, in: Majumdar, R.C. (ed), *Swami Vivekananda Centenary Memorial Volume*, Calcutta, Swami Vivekananda Centenary, 1963.
- Vivekananda Swami, 1975, *Thus Spake Vivekananda*, Madras. Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1975.
- Vivekananda Swami, 1983, *The Complete Works of Vivekananda*, Calcutta, Advaita Ashram.
- Vivekananda, Swami, 1985, *The Complete Works of Vivekananda*, Calcutta, Advaita Ashram.
- van der Westhuizen, J., 1991, "The Human Rights debate in South Africa", in *A Democratic Vision for South Africa*. Pietermaritzburg, Encounter Publications.

METAPHYSICAL AND ETHICAL PRINCIPLES IN SWAMI VIVEKANANDA'S THOUGHT

J G Desai*

VIVEKANANDA : FORMATIVE YEARS

Born as Narendranath in 1863 in the famous Kayastha Dutta family of Calcutta, Vivekananda, unlike the large majority of Indians whose cause he later passionately espoused, had the advantages of a high social status and religious and educational opportunities. Endowed with a keen intellect, he had a strong proclivity to trance states; even as a child he used to lose himself often in meditation for long hours.¹ Besides a knowledge of his native Bengali and Sanskrit, Vivekananda also received the benefits of Western education. At Calcutta University he mastered English, Western Logic and Philosophy.

But at a critical juncture in his young career Narendra was negatively influenced by the utilitarianism of J S Mill and Spencer, the rationalistic scepticism of Hume and the theory of the survival of the fittest of Darwin. They cut right across his faith in his ancestral culture. The nihilistic notions implied in their worldviews rendered him temporarily an agnostic.² Later, however, as Swami Vivekananda (his monastic title) he criticised the agnostics and the Utilitarians when he lectured to capacity houses in the West. The turning-point in his public career as a brilliant exponent of Vedanta followed in the wake of his phenomenal success in the Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1893.³

Earlier he had come under the spell of the Brahmo Samaj led at the time by Keshab Chander Sen. Christian missionaries, in their conversion attempts, were severely critical of Hinduism, its metaphysics, rituals and the caste system. While many Hindu orthodox leaders were against change in any form, there were many progressive thinkers who felt that much of the Christian criticism was justified and so started campaigns for reform. The reformers felt that the basic principles of Hinduism were sound but there was a great need to

* Department of Indian Philosophy, University of Durban-Westville

eschew the excrescences like excessive ritualism, superstitions and idolatry. Some movements such as the Arya Samaj, the Brahmo Samaj, the Prarthana Samaj and the Radha Saomi Satsang sought to purify Hinduism from within by reducing rituals to a bare minimum. Some reformers urged Hindus to see in the person of Jesus a noble example of moral and spiritual excellence worthy of emulation. Keshab Chander Sen and Ramakrishna advocated this doctrine which was later adopted by Vivekananda.

RAMAKRISHNA

Both Ramakrishna and Vivekananda had met Keshab; but whereas Keshab failed to influence Ramakrishna, Keshab had impressed the young Vivekananda.⁴ Finally it was Ramakrishna who exerted considerable influence over both of them. Vivekananda's proclivity to spirituality was only temporarily allayed by secular education and the mild forms of worship enjoined by the Brahmo Samaj. Ramakrishna perfectly understood the deep longing for immortality which Vivekananda had always felt. Under Ramakrishna's guidance,⁵ Vivekananda became an adept in concentration until one day he had the ultimate realization of his identity with the Absolute.⁶

Ramakrishna, who had negligible formal education, exhibited throughout his life a rare spirituality, a quality which imparted to him a charisma that attracted thousands of people. Great social leaders including Keshab Sen, Partap Mazumdar, Vijaykumar Goswami, itinerant monks, "Christians, Muhammedan, Sikhs, great literary geniuses and philosophical thinkers, theologians and professors" and many aspirants from all walks of life paid homage to him.⁷ He showed that outward conformity to religious rituals was of little use. He breathed new life into them by emphasizing, both by preaching and personal example, their esoteric significance. Initially, he addressed the Hindu concept of God-realisation by worshipping the divine as the female *Kali*, the Bengali deity. After his spiritual quest was crowned with the vision of *Kali* as universal power and presence, he launched an astonishing mystical career of devotion to the principal deities of Hinduism. He claimed to have been rewarded with singular success in all his undertakings. What is remarkable in the case of Ramakrishna is that, unlike most seekers after truth, he continued to experiment with almost every form of religious practice enjoined in the Hindu texts.⁸

For him it was the same reality which appeared in various forms according to the aptitude and psychological disposition of the votary.⁹ The impersonal Absolute when conceived as creator was God for him. On the basis of these

doctrines he tended to justify all conceptions of theism within every religious system.¹⁰ Ramakrishna claims a unique position in world religion by holding that he had intuited both Jesus and Islam's prophet Mohammed.¹¹ Thus for him the manifestation of God was not restricted to any one religion. It was on this basis that he asserted that there are no fundamental distinctions between religions, but that each one is a pathway to God.¹² For him doctrinal distinctions divide but not spiritual facts which give self-certifying conviction. This teaching, his chief disciple, Vivekananda, was to preach later with ardent persuasion and a certain measure of success. Vivekananda under his master's tutorship was initiated into profound religious mysteries.¹³ But both for teacher and disciple the crowning experience of mysticism was knowledge of one's identity with Brahman.

ADVAITA VEDANTA

Reality in its true essence when experienced, obliterates all sense of the individual self and all distinctions due to the discursive intellect. Thus for them the formless Absolute was a higher conception than theism, and judged by this standard, much of Hinduism and all other religions, fall short in their conceptions of reality.¹⁴ Thus Vivekananda's constant theme was Advaita idealism with which he enthralled his audiences in America and England, a surprising phenomenon for the time. In his audience, there were many for whom Vedanta sounded very strange. In intellectual circles, however, Vedanta was not alien.¹⁵ Vivekananda achieved great success because he was a lecturer of an extraordinary personal magnetism. Understandably, opposition to him came from Christian missionaries who saw in his ideas a threat to their own evangelistic efforts in India. He had gone to the Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1893 to present the Hindu viewpoint and to appeal for donations for his impoverished country.¹⁶ The instant success there brought him more invitations to lecture for three consecutive years, but little money. Vivekananda's most influential disciples came from America and England, especially the English headmistress Margaret Noble who became famous as Sister Nivedita, her monastic title. She continued to spread his ideas after his death, being especially remembered for her espousal of women's education in India.¹⁷

After his exposure to Western culture in America he was appalled by the general cultural stagnation in India. But his optimistic enthusiasm and indomitable spirit led him to consider that the Indian situation was not hopeless. His conclusion was that Indian culture could be revitalised, that the times required not a surrender of its essential principles but a reformulation

of them; not a slavish imitation of the Western institutions;¹⁸ but a remodelling of the philosophico-religious heritage in the light of actual national needs.¹⁹ He advocated the adoption of many sound Western values in education, in social organization, in optimism and self-reliance.²⁰

METAPHYSICS

It is true that Śāṅkara, (800 A.D.), the systematic formulator of non-dualism, sees the main business of philosophy as the transcendence of the universe. For him philosophy is spiritual in intention and end. The negative stress lies in his constantly recurring theme of one's true nature as the Absolute, of the mutability of things and the world's unreality, of the renunciation of earthly and heavenly desires, and the thirst for liberation.²¹ These views have Vivekananda's approval as well, but only in the final analysis, soteriologically speaking. But it is far from being the main burden of Vivekananda's teachings especially with regard to ethics. He rightly states that such hard disciplines are only for the ascetic intellectual.²²

"The Jñāni is a tremendous rationalist: he denies everything... takes nothing for granted; he analyses by pure reason and force of will, until he reaches Nirvana which is the extinction of all relativity."²³

When the veil of ignorance is sundered then the realisation of the relation between the finite and the infinite is understood. It is because Vivekananda's contribution to the history of idealistic ideas is so extraordinary in this regard that he deserves to be quoted at length.

"Wherever there is any blessing, blissfulness, or joy, even the joy of the thief in stealing, it is that Absolute bliss coming out, only it has become obscured... as it were, with all sorts of extraneous conditions, and misunderstood. But to understand that, we have to go through the negation, and then the positive side will begin. We have to give up ignorance and all that is false, and then truth will begin to reveal itself to us. When we have grasped the truth, things which we gave up at first will take new shape and form; will appear to us in a new light, and become deified. They will have become sublimated, and then we shall understand them in their true light."²⁴

The view of the consequent loss of finite consciousness and so of the world in Brahman experience has been a problem for monistic idealism since the early Upanisads. Vivekananda here adds his insight to the question of the nature of the changed world perspective, after the mystic's return to finite consciousness. He recovers the world and gives it a new status. The source,

the Absolute, it seems, has given of its spiritual profundity to material entities. It imparts not only a kind of reality to the world but also one which is deified. In the actual transcendence the world is negated. Here Vivekananda belongs to the ancient tradition. But he differs so uniquely by gloriously retrieving the world and divinising it. This view has significant consequences which he fully utilises for practical humanitarian ethics.

TWO DOCTRINES

Of the two doctrines, negation and positive acceptance of the world, Vivekananda definitely favoured the latter. At the same time he had to affirm Brahman's transcendence and supremacy from the historical process. He pointed out that the "real is infinitely greater than the external, which is only a shadowy projection of the true one";²⁵ that "It is the Atman, beyond all, the Infinite, beyond the known".²⁶ "Spirit is beyond space and time and is everywhere".²⁷ "In reality, this individual soul is the unconditional Absolute Brahman (the Supreme)".²⁸ His views regarding the world are expressed in the following representative quotations. "This world is neither true nor untrue, it is the shadow of truth."²⁹ As a shadowy projection the world has a certain validity, though it is not perfectly true. At times he inclines towards manifestation: "The Atman... is the eternal witness of all its own manifestations."³⁰ "Infinite manifestation dividing itself in portion still remains infinite, and each portion is infinite."³¹

On many occasions he used pantheistic descriptions:

"This Absolute (a) has become the universe (b) by coming through time, space, and causation. (They) are like the glass through which the Absolute is seen, and when it is seen on the lower side, It appears as the universe."³²

Also:

"Brahman is the same in two forms – changeable and unchangeable, expressed and unexpressed. Know that Knower and the known are one."³³

Again:

"Undifferentiated consciousness, when differentiated, becomes the world."³⁴

What are the reasons for such ambiguous statements? It was no easy task for a thinker whose main preoccupation was the explication of religio-philosophical

issues, to communicate his ideas to large audiences. Thus the philosophical technicalities of the Advaita had to be presented in terms readily accessible to average audiences. And there was the added problem that while the Advaita was strange to Western ears, Indians were generally familiar with theistic, and polytheistic notions. What is amazing is that he tried at all, and met with a remarkable measure of success.

For Vivekananda the Absolute is the only source of the world and because of the difficulty in explaining the relation between the two, he uses terms of manifestation, pantheism, emanation, expression, creation and appearance.³⁵ Besides his wish to reach his listeners, he had also a missionary interest, namely, the spiritual transformation of society. Hence his neo-Vedantic realism. His apparent inconsistencies and ambiguities are not indicative of confusion. He is careful to present logically the Advaita postulates before using those terms of reference that seemingly compromise his position.

THE BASIS OF VIVEKANANDA'S METAPHYSICS

His metaphysics is based on *śruti*, 'Śankara's system, reason, and, one must assume, because of his avowed declarations,³⁶ his own intuitive knowledge. The essential portions of the Vedas for him are the Upaniṣads "the foundation-stone of Vedānta philosophy."³⁷ For him the ancient seers had gleaned the eternal verities of ethical and spiritual life grounded in the Imperishable. They had preached principles and not personalities.³⁸ These principles are verifiable in experience. Therefore Vedic revelation, as presented in scripture, the written word, is mediate knowledge about the immediacy of the supernatural or "direct perception" of truth.³⁹

THE ABSOLUTE AND MĀYĀ

What could be mistaken for pantheism in Vivekananda's view about the Absolute becoming the universe via time, space and causation, or its degeneration into the universe is qualified by him with his expression "if we may be permitted to say so."⁴⁰ Vivekananda assumes *a priori* the notion of the Absolute, after the Upaniṣads and Śankara. As perfect, indivisible and indeterminate reality the Absolute is beyond time. Hence it cannot be said to have become the limited world, but the world is its appearance.⁴¹

GOD, THE ABSOLUTE AND MĀYĀ

The hypothesis of God as creator is a weak one. God has necessarily to be seen as external to nature, a *deus ex machina*. There is the ethical objection

of a partisan creator God who "simply expresses the cruel fiat of an all-powerful being."⁴² Metaphysically, the design theory is objectionable for God is seen as a grand architect planning the universal process. The when and why of it all enters the picture. Where did He obtain the material to create? Was it in Himself or was it co-existent? If the former, then "God is sometimes potential and sometimes kinetic, which would make Him mutable" and God dies.⁴³ If the latter, then God stands in need of materials having limited His omnipotence and abrogated His independence. Because of the unsatisfactory nature of these alternatives, Vivekananda concludes that the Absolute appears as the world.

But, whence this appearance? For him the only safe recourse is to adopt the humble attitude of agnosticism.⁴⁴ To divine the secret nature of the paradox of the Absolute's relation to the world has been a perennial problem of philosophy. If the answer was known it would mean the exposure of Brahman to the knowing finite mind, reducing it to the relative.⁴⁵ *Māyā* has as one of its significance the element of mystery, the unknowability of it all. To concede two realities, Brahman and the world, requires "two absolute independent existences which cannot be caused... time, space and causation cannot be said to be independent existences."⁴⁶ The two sides, ignorance of the world's appearance and its existence in space and time, are both denoted by the term *māyā*. A strict dualism cannot be altogether avoided since, the Absolute and the world, however temporary the world's tenure, co-exist. This concession of two realities in Vivekananda's thought is justified only on the ground of the momentary mysterious grounding of the world in the Absolute. Brahman remains independent, undiminished, perfect. As it constitutes the world's reality it is the latter that is dependent on it, and earns the title of illusion.⁴⁷ Vivekananda's statements of Brahman becoming the world or as really expressed in it, is actuated by the compulsion of the notion that the world is really rooted in the spiritual. No pantheism is actually intended. To aver that this is so, is to fly in the face of evidence to the contrary. He never tires of demonstrating the untenability of the view of qualified monism of Ramanuja that the world and souls are the real body of God. Not does he favour any form of dualism.⁴⁸ His description of the world process is that the Absolute manifests itself in it, and is superior to and different from any of its configurations. It is under the burden of this enthusiasm to denote the Absolute's transcendence that he stresses sometimes the illusory and dream images of *māyā* or even totally denies the existence of the world. "Upon (the Atman) name and form have painted all these dreams."⁴⁹ But the world is real from the sense-mental perspective, and the Absolute is real from the intuitive.⁵⁰

These consideration lead him to this theory of world-realism of unity in diversity. "The whole of this universe is one Unity, one Existence, physically, mentally, morally and spiritually."⁵¹ It is the same reality which appears differently from different perspectives. The holistic view demands loyalty to an all-inclusiveness. Thus under the theme of Unity in diversity, the one in the many, Vivekananda counselled a spiritual view even of the material world.

The same constitutional necessity that makes us believe the world to be real, makes us believe also in the idea of a personal God. The fact of love, in differing degrees, in us, our feeling for immortality, our seeking the pleasurable in life, all indicate that we aspire to a higher destiny whose name is God. He stated:

"I admit that a Personal God cannot be demonstrated. But He is the highest reading of the Impersonal that can be reached by the human intellect, and what else is the universe but various readings of the Absolute?"⁵²

It is interesting to see how strict logic necessitates an almost forcible exclusion of earthly demands of the senses because they are based on a false notion of the reality of things. And yet Vivekananda accommodates the two kinds of realities as one unity, the phenomenal and the noumenal and the personal and impersonal conceptions of noumenon, conceived from two different standpoints.

The notion of a Personal God is a conception from the phenomenal side, and

"God as the cause of this universe must naturally be thought of as limited, and yet He is the same Impersonal God."⁵³

In other words, our notions of truth or of the Absolute as notions are necessarily limited. We call truth God. We take two views of reality from two different standpoints. Hence emerges Vivekananda's strong stand on the reality of the world included in the Absolute as immanent ground:

"...the whole is the Absolute; but within it every particle is in a constant state of flux and change. It is unchangeable and changeable at the same time, Impersonal and Personal in one. This is our conception of the universe, of motion and of God, and that is what is meant by 'Thou art That'. Thus we see that the Impersonal instead of doing away with the Personal, the Absolute instead of pulling down the relative, only explains it to the full satisfaction of our reason and heart."⁵⁴

THE RATIONAL CRITERION

It is this comprehensiveness that enables him to adopt the catholic attitude to non-Advaita systems – pluralism, dualism, qualified monism and even the Semitic monotheisms. But as a rational system he declared that the Advaita alone is "the most rational of all religious theories."⁵⁵ Other systems are useful as temporary measures but in the end the Advaita truth has to be realised. He believes that the temper of the modern age, its spirit of reason and science, can make his theories acceptable. The "highest ideal of morality" and the "real basis of ethics" requires the "highest philosophical and scientific conception." The question of religious differences also needs the solvent of reason. He wrote:

"Why religions should claim that they are not bound to abide by the standpoint of reason, no one knows. If one does not take the standard of reason, there cannot be any true judgement."⁵⁶

Ordinary faith which is a nominal assent to traditional belief is not the faith which saves. "A man must have not only faith but intellectual faith too."⁵⁷ Because of dogmatic differences in religions, scripture alone cannot be our guide. He further points out that "there must be some independent authority, and that cannot be any book, but something which is universal, and what is more universal than reason?"⁵⁸

While reason has its uses against blind attachment and loyalty to tradition and can satisfy the intellectual side, it is intuitive knowledge that can genuinely quell inter-religious conflict.⁵⁹ Intuition brings abiding certitude which both religion and philosophy seek. Intuition is another name for religion. "What we experience in the depths of our souls is realisation,"⁶⁰ for, "only the man who has actually perceived God and soul has religion."⁶¹ The realist apprehends concrete matter alone but for the "really genuine idealist, who has truly arrived at the power of perception,... the changeful universe has vanished."⁶²

ETHICS IN VIVEKANANDA'S THOUGHT

Vivekananda seeks to alter the mental bias that sees matter as matter, to a conception of matter as spirit. Since there exists the inveterate tendency of the mind to take the actual things as real, it is better to regard them as divine. The false world of our own psychological conditioning has to be given up. He called on man to "open your eyes and see that as such it never existed; it was a dream, *māyā*. What existed was the Lord Himself."⁶³ The investiture

of secular things with divine raiment has the principal aim of directing ordinary activity in terms of a higher spiritual ethic. It is not a negation of ethics but its revision. It is working with a different kind of motivation – transfigured activity which imprints eternity on time. Psychologically its value lies in its liberating experience, the release from the necessity and compulsion of sense demands, from the tyranny and the obsession with ego-centred action.

"Work incessantly, holding life as something deified, as God Himself, and knowing that this is all we have to do, this is all we should ask for. God is in everything, where else shall we go to find Him?"⁶⁴

wrote Vivekananda. Elsewhere he taught:

"Look upon every man, woman, and every one as God. You cannot help anyone, you can only serve... Do it only as a worship. I should see God in the poor... The poor and the miserable are for our salvation, so that we may serve the Lord, coming in the shape of the diseased, coming in the shape of the lunatic, the leper and the sinner."⁶⁵

This teaching is the direct outcome of Ramakrishna's influence. Once, having returned to normal consciousness from *Samādhi* (supersensuous experience) Ramakrishna said that it was arrogant condescension for man to profess that he can have "compassion for all beings." He indignantly declared:

"you wretch, who are you to bestow it? No, no; not compassion to jivas (souls), but service to them as Shiva (God)".

Vivekananda thereupon commented:

"Ah! what a wonderful light I have got today from the master's words. In synthesizing the Vedantic knowledge; which was generally regarded as dry, austere and even cruel, with sweet devotion to the Lord, what a new mellowed means of experiencing the Truth has he revealed... If Man can... look upon all the persons... as Shiva, how can there be an occasion for him to regard himself as superior to them, yes, or to be even kind to them?"⁶⁶

This new social ethic, constantly iterated in his public addresses is profoundly humanitarian. This led R P Srivastava to conclude that Vivekananda's was "one of the greatest humanistic approaches ever made by philosophers."⁶⁷ Vivekananda, however, does not ignore the individualistic basis for ethical discipline of the traditional Advaita.

"Day and night say, 'I am He'. It is the greatest strength; it is religion... never say, 'O Lord, I am a miserable sinner. Who will help you? You are the God of the universe."⁶⁸

Also, "never forget the glory of human nature. We are the greatest God... Christs and Buddhas are but waves on the boundless Ocean which I am."⁶⁹ The constant iteration of the theme declared above shows how for Vivekananda a metaphysical postulate can be pressed into the service of an ethical discipline. It is for him the strongest antidote to fear or what may be called "existential anxiety." It is positive assertion of enthusiasm and unbounded self-confidence.

In the Parliament of Religions he must have startled his audience with a similar declaration:

"... the Hindu refuses to call you sinners.... Ye divinities on earth – sinners! It is a sin to call a man so; it is a standing libel on human nature. Come up O lions, and shake off the delusion that you are sheep."⁷⁰

The traditional monistic idealism asserted the essential immortality of one's self. It implied a purely individual penitential discipline belonging to the species of self-perfection. Vivekananda grants that a superior psychological type, the *Jnāni*, can alone succeed in this rigorous path of discriminative knowledge. Vivekananda, however, combines the two versions, the traditional individualistic model with his new "deification principle". Both of them have the self-same theme, namely, "That one is manifesting Himself as many, as matter, spirit, mind, thought, and everything else." In this unification of the two models the individualistic strain has also been made relevant to a social setting.

One of the desired results of these disciplines is assertion of one's potential being. The other, as already stated, is negative banishment of weakness and positive strengthening of self-confidence on the basis of the spiritual identity of the race. He wrote, "without the supernatural sanction... or the perception of the superconscious... there can be no ethics."⁷¹

Furthermore, Vivekananda believes that the universe is a play of the clash between self-interest and self-denial. Generally, for him, the East, especially India, exemplifies the latter spirit while the West the former. Self-sacrifice in the interests of the whole means the gradual diminishing of the individuality; the removal of the selfish propensity through the assertion of one's universal

self, the Absolute, for "Perfect self-annihilation is the ideal of ethics", not utilitarian expediency. He states,

"my idea is to show that the highest ideal of morality and unselfishness goes hand in hand with the highest metaphysical conception, and that you need not lower your conception to get ethics and morality, but, on the other hand, to reach a real basis of morality and ethics you must have the highest philosophical and scientific conceptions."⁷²

UTILITARIANISM

For Vivekananda utilitarianism is too narrow an ethic as it is based on purely pragmatic considerations. This theory breaks down because one's interests are not always guaranteed. It has little room for altruism. Its vision of things is limited to the finite world regarded as the only goal. Vivekananda lamented that:

"the utilitarian wants us to give up the struggle after the Infinite... as impracticable and absurd, and, in the same breath, asks us to take up ethics and do good to society."⁷³

Doing good as an ethic is a:

"Secondary consideration. We must have an ideal. Ethics itself is not the end, but the means to the end."

A further weakness of utilitarianism is that its ideal of societal good could be interpreted selfishly, namely that altruism can be ruled out completely. Why should not one's own happiness take precedence over others? For Vivekananda a purely secular view fails to take into account the ideal aspirations of mankind. The mark of civilisation is the attempt to rise above nature, embracing spiritual ideals; conversely, civilisation falls when these are neglected.

MĀYĀ AND EVOLUTION

Though *Māyā*'s existence is a mystery, its source is non other than Brahman. Its relation to Brahman is as an inexplicable power concealing and projecting the universe. As its source Brahman can be called its originator. It is neither "absolute zero" nor truly existent as "that can be said only of the Absolute." The rope appears as a snake. So too Brahman appears as the universe. In a

sense Brahman "came to think of Itself as imperfect, as joined to and conditioned by matter." Thus it seems that the Absolute, in some sense, is the cause of Its own limitation in finite forms, Vivekananda calls Brahman or God intelligence. It shines as the universe, but limits Itself as cosmic energy whose forms are matter, thought, force and intelligence.

Everything... is His creation, or to be a little more accurate, is His projection; or to be still more accurate, is the Lord Himself.' God, as the material and efficient cause

"gets involved in the minute cell, and evolves at the other end and becomes God again. It is He that comes down and becomes the lowest atom, and slowly unfolding His nature, rejoins Himself. This is the mystery of the universe, its cosmic or teleological significance."⁷⁴

Thus man's conscious direction of his life ought to be in accordance with the cosmic scheme as he has its backing. If the mollusc or amoeba evolves to animal and human forms, it does so unconsciously. Within certain limits man can exercise the option of his free-will and can liberate himself from the cycle of rebirth, a theory which is the "only logical conclusion of thoughtful men", and which is essential for our moral well-being. Repetitive experiences in the world are not the only aim of life. In fact experiences themselves in the end engender the feeling for the transcendent.

LIBERATION

For Vivekananda the world is a mixture of good and evil, of pleasure and pain. The differences between them are not final but relative. Good and evil have no separate origins. They are interpretations of subjective selves in relation to life's problems and conditions. Agreeable or disagreeable experiences make life for one either good or bad. Man is not so thoroughly depraved, that he cannot rise in virtue or spiritual stature. Imperfection is man's condition in space – time. Moral excellence or perfection in exceptional individuals is still short of the mark. True perfection is viewed in absolute terms. The status of perfection belongs to those who have achieved perfect conscious control over the mental self and thereby have identified with their infinite nature.⁷⁵ Attachment to things of the senses, the basic urge to life and clinging to it tenaciously in the midst of tragedy, inspired by a futuristic optimism in a better turn of events, is cosmic ignorance, delusion, *māyā*.

FEFERENCES

1. Majumdar, R C (ed), *Swami Vivekananda Centenary Memorial Volume*, p 34.
2. Ghanananda, S and Parrinder, D (ed), *Swami Vivekananda in East and West*, pp 18 and 22.
3. Majumdar, R C (ed), *op cit.*, p 86.
4. *ibid*, p 42.
5. Ghanananda, S and Parrinder, D (ed), p 24.
6. *ibid*.
7. Majumdar, R C (ed), p 45.
8. *ibid*.
9. *ibid*, pp 45 and 51.
10. *ibid*, p 45.
11. Isherwood, C, *Ramakrishna and His Disciples*, pp 124; 148.
12. Prabhavananda S, *The Spiritual Heritage of India*, pp 340 341.
13. Ghanananda S, (*et al*), pp 43–44.
14. cf. For Ninian Smart "the universalist message of Swami Vivekananda, and of...Ramakrishna, genuinely represents a new departure in world religions – the attempt to make the highest form of Hinduism a world faith. In so doing the Vedanta would cease to be the highest form of Hinduism as such: but it would become the highest form of religion in general" quoted in Ghanananda and Parrinder (ed), p 71.
15. Rolland, R, *The Life of Vivekananda and the Universal Gospel*, pp 47–50.
16. *Complete works of Swami Vivekananda* (hereafter C W) Vol 1, p 20.
17. Rolland, R, *op. cit.* p 92.
18. C. W. Vol III, p 195; p 441.
19. Ghanananda, S (*et al*), pp 96–100.
20. *ibid*, pp 101–103.

21. Ghambhirananda, S, *Brahma-sutra Bhasya of Sri Sankaracarya*, p 9.
22. C.W. Volume VIII, p 10.
23. C.W. Volume II, p 167.
24. C.W. Vol II, p 167.
25. C.W., Vol VII, p 11.
26. C.W., Vol II, p 248.
27. C.W., Vol VII, p 7.
28. C.W., Vol VIII, p 157.
29. C.W., Vol VII, p 11.
30. *ibid*, p 34.
31. *ibid*, p 35.
32. C.W., Vol II, p 30.
33. C.W., Vol VII, p 35.
34. *ibid*, p 39.
35. C.W., Vol II, p 248.
36. Isherwood, C, *op. cit.*, p 207.
37. C.W., Vol VII, p 355.
38. *ibid*.
39. *ibid*, p 232.
40. Vol II, pp 130–131.
41. *ibid*.
42. C.W., Vol I, p 8.
43. *ibid*, p 7.
44. *ibid*, p 10.
45. C.W., Vol II, p 132; 465.
46. *ibid*, p 135.

47. *ibid*, p 248.
48. C.W., Vol II, p 464.
49. *ibid*, p 275.
50. *ibid*, p 362.
51. *ibid*, p 249.
52. C.W., Vol II, p 337.
53. *ibid.*, p 338.
54. *ibid.*
55. *ibid*, p 337.
56. *ibid.* p 335.
57. *ibid.*
58. *ibid.*
59. *ibid*, p 163.
60. C.W., Vol III, p 54.
61. C.W., Vol II, p 163.
62. *ibid*, p 333.
63. *ibid*, p 147.
64. *ibid*, p 150.
65. C.W., Vol III, pp 246–247.
66. Ghanananda and Parrinder (ed), *op. cit.*, p 29.
67. Srivastava, R P, *Contemporary Indian Idealism* p 48.
68. C.W., Vol III, p 26.
69. Rolland, R, *op. cit.* Preface.
70. C.W., Vol I, p 11.
71. C.W., Vol II, p 63.
72. C.W., Vol II. p 355.
73. C.W., Vol II, p 63.
74. C.W., Vol II, p 211.
75. C.W., Vol II, p 353.

THE NEO-VEDANTA PHILOSOPHY OF SWAMI VIVEKANANDA

Anil Sooklal*

NEO-VEDANTA AND SRI RAMAKRISHNA

The basis of the Neo-Vedanta philosophy was laid by Sri Ramakrishna (1836–1886) and its superstructure was built by his ardent disciple Swami Vivekananda (1863–1902). They both emphasised the practical nature of Vedanta. By the Neo-Vedanta of Swami Vivekananda is meant the New-Vedanta as distinguished from the old traditional Vedanta developed by Śankaracharya (c. 788–820 AD). Śankara's Vedanta is known as Advaita or non-dualism, pure and simple. Hence it is sometimes referred to as *Kevala-Advaita* or unqualified monism. It may also be called abstract monism in so far as Brahman, the Ultimate Reality, is, according to it, devoid of all qualities and distinctions, *nirguna* and *nirvisesa*. According to Rathna Reddy (1984 : 18–19), Neo-Vedantism is a re-establishment and re-statement, reconstruction and revaluation, reorientation and reinterpretation of the Advaita Vedanta of Sankara with modern arguments, in modern language, suited to modern man, adjusting itself with all the modern challenges.

The Neo-Vedanta is also Advaitic inasmuch as it holds that Brahman, the Ultimate Reality, is one without a second, *ekamevadvityam*. But as distinguished from the traditional Advaita of Śankara, it is a synthetic Vedanta which reconciles Dvaita or dualism and Advaita or non-dualism and also other theories of reality. In this sense it may also be called concrete monism in so far as it holds that Brahman is both qualified, *saguna* and qualityless, *nirguna* (Chatterjee, 1963 : 260).

The germs of Neo-Vedantism as also the rationale and beginning of its practical application are to be found in the life and teachings of Sri Ramakrishna. It was left to Swami Vivekananda to develop them into the philosophy of Neo-Vedanta and lay the foundation of practical Vedanta. The fundamental principles on which Neo-Vedanta and its practical application rest may be traced to the Vedas and Upanishads. But it was Sri Ramakrishna

* Department of Hindu Studies, University of Durban-Westville

who demonstrated and synthesised the teachings through his manifold spiritual experiences. In my analysis of Swami Vivekananda's philosophy I shall examine the distinctive features of Neo-Vedanta as it characterised his life, teachings and works, and as currently embodied by the Ramakrishna Movement internationally.

Swami Vivekananda was confident that his rational interpretation of his Master's ideas was thoroughly consistent with his Master's spiritualism. It has been very aptly said that Swami Vivekananda is a commentary on Sri Ramakrishna. But the commentator with his giant intellect and profound understanding made such distinctive contributions that his commentary becomes itself a philosophy. Swami Vivekananda had before him a living model, as it were, of a new type of Vedanta, in Sri Ramakrishna. He lived long enough in the inspiring presence of Sri Ramakrishna, and understood him well enough to be in a position to build-up the super-structure of Neo-Vedantism with its practical application (Chatterjee, 1963 : 267–268).

BRAHMAN

For Swami Vivekananda, Brahman as Infinite Existence, Infinite Knowledge and Infinite Bliss, *sat-cit-ananda*, is the ultimate reality and the only reality. These are the only attributes that can be ascribed to Brahman, and they are one. It is without a name, without a form or stain, being beyond space, time and causation. It is one without a second. It is all in all. None else exists. "There is neither nature, nor God, nor the universe, only that One Infinite Existence, out of which, through name and form all these are manufactures" (Vivekananda, 1980 : 292). Swami Vivekananda maintains that the Advaita clearly postulates one reality only, that is, Brahman; everything else is "unreal", manifested and manufactured out of Brahman by the power of *Māyā*. To reach back to that Brahman is our goal. We are, each one of us, that Brahman, that Reality, plus this *Māyā*. Brahman is an indeterminate, impersonal Being without qualities and distinctions, without any relation to any object or the world of objects. This means that Swami Vivekananda's Brahman is perfectly formless, qualityless and distinctionless, *nirguna* and *nirvisesa*, like Śankara's Absolute and that there is no difference between them on this point. However, this is only one aspect of Brahman as viewed by Swami Vivekananda. For in Swami Vivekananda's Vedantic thought there are two movements, a negative and a positive.

The description of Brahman given above is the result of the negative movement of his thought. It is the traditional approach to Brahman by the path of negation, *neti-neti*. But as a complementary to the negative path, he

follows also a positive path and re-affirms all that was at first negated in a new light and with a new meaning (Chatterjee, 1963 : 269).

To understand Brahman, Swami Vivekananda states, "We have to go through the negation, and then the positive side will begin. We have to give up ignorance and all that is false, and then truth will begin to reveal itself to us. When we have grasped the truth, things which we give up at first will take new shape and form, will appear to us in a new light, and become deified. They will have become sublimated, and then we shall understand them in their true light. But to understand them we have first to get a glimpse of truth; we must give them up at first, and then we get them back again, deified" (CW2, 1983 : 166–167).

For Swami Vivekananda, the aspect of the Absolute as *Ishvara*, the Personal God, is none other than the relative aspect of Brahman. He points out that it is the same *-sat-cit-ananda* who is also the God of love, the Impersonal and Personal is one. The Personal God worshipped by the *bhaktā* is not separate or different from Brahman. All is Brahman, the One without a second; only Brahman, as unity or absolute, is too much of an abstraction to be loved and worshipped; so the *bhaktā* chooses the relative aspect of Brahman, that is *Ishvara*, the Supreme Ruler (Vivekananda, 1978 : 11). The Personal God as we conceive of Him is in fact a phenomenon. The very idea of causation exists only in the phenomenal world, and God as the cause of this universe must naturally be thought of as limited, and yet He is the same Impersonal God. The Impersonal instead of doing away with the Personal, the Absolute instead of pulling down the relative, only explains it to the full satisfaction of our reason and heart. The Personal God and all that exists in the universe are the same Impersonal Being seen through our minds (CW2, 1983 : 338–339).

Swami Vivekananda maintains that the world of objects is not totally negated in Brahman. It is not, as is the case with Śankara's Advaita, that Brahman alone is real and the world is false or illusory, *brahman satyam, jaganmithya*, but that in a sense the world is also real. Swami Vivekananda states that the Vedanta does not in reality denounce the world. What it seeks to teach is the deification of the world and not its annihilation – giving up the world as we ordinarily think of it, as it appears to us and to know what it really is. As Swami Vivekananda states (1980 : 132): "Deify it (the world), it is God alone"; and he cites the opening verse of the *Isa Upanishad* which says (Gambhirananda, 1957 : 4):

"Isavasyam idam sarvam yat kim ca jagatyam jagat"
All this – whatsoever moves on the earth –
should be covered by the Lord."

He further explains (CW2, 1983 : 146–147): "You can have your wife, it does not mean that you are to abandon her but that you are to see God in the wife". So also, you are to "see God in your children. So in everything. In life and in death, in happiness and in misery the Lord is equally present. The whole world is full of the Lord. Open your eyes and see Him. This is what Vedanta teaches."

As further evidence of Swami Vivekananda's affirmation of the world in God, we may consider what he says with regard to the way and the attitude with which we are to work in the world. This, he says, is the Vedantic way and the Vedantic attitude. We are to work by giving up the apparent, that is, the illusive world. This means that we are to work by seeing God everywhere. The sum total of all souls, which, as he put it, is "the only God I believe in, and above all my God the wicked, my God the miserable, my God the poor of all races" (Nath, 1982 : 125). Desire to live a hundred years, he says, have all earthly desires, if you wish, only deify them, convert them into heaven. Thus working, you will find the way out. There is no other way. If a man plunges headlong into the foolish luxuries of the world without knowing the truth, he has missed his footing, he cannot reach the goal. And if a man curses the world, goes into a forest, mortifies his flesh, and kills himself little by little by starvation, makes his heart a barren waste, kills out all feelings, and becomes harsh, stern and dried up, that man also has missed the way. These are the two extremes, the two mistakes at either end. Both have lost the way, both have missed the goal. So work, says the Vedanta, putting God in everything and knowing Him to be in everything (Vivekananda, 1980 : 137–138).

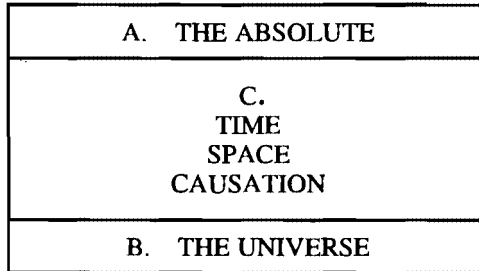
Swami Vivekananda's Neo-Vedanta makes no difference between the sacred and the secular life. As world is Brahman, worldly activity too is sacred and all selfless work is worship. Therefore, selfless activity is not only social but also spiritual. As long as man lives in the world he must perform worldly activity in the spirit of detachment. Thus Neo Vedanta encourages individual freedom and selfless activity on the part of the individual, and social equality and oneness in society (Reddy, 1984 : 19).

THE UNIVERSE

We may now consider Swami Vivekananda's affirmation of the world from the orientation of Brahman. "The Absolute", he says "has become the universe by coming through space, time and causation. The universe is the reflection of that One Eternal Being on the screen of *Māyā* – the triad of

space, time and causation. These are only ideas or concepts of our mind and have no place in Brahman. The world is a creation of name and form, of *Māyā*. We are looking upon the One existence in different forms and under different names, and 'creating' all these images of objects upon it.

Swami Vivekananda graphically illustrates how the infinite Brahman, the Absolute became the finite (see diagram) (Vivekananda, 1980 : 108)



The Absolute (A) has become the Universe (B). However, by this is meant not only the material world, but the mental world, the spiritual world – heaven and earth and in fact everything that exists. Mind is the name of a change, and body the name of another change, and so on, and all these changes compose our universe. This Absolute (A) has become the Universe (B) by coming through time space and causation (C). Time, space and causation are like the glass through which the Absolute is seen, and when it is seen on the lower side, it appears as the universe (Vivekananda, 1980 : 108–109). There is neither time, space, nor causation in the Absolute, it is beyond them all. They have no real existence, yet they are not non-existent, since it is through them that all things are manifesting as this universe. Further, they sometimes vanish. Swami Vivekananda illustrates this in terms of the wave and the ocean. The wave is the same as the ocean, and yet we know it as a wave, and as such different from the ocean. What makes it different from the ocean are its names and forms.

If the wave subsides, the form vanishes in a moment, and yet the form was not a delusion. So long as the wave existed the form was there, and you are bound to see the form. This, for Swami Vivekananda is *Māyā* (Chatterjee, 1963 : 270–271). The differentiation is in the form, not in the substance. You may destroy the form and it disappears for ever; but the substance remains the same.

Swami Vivekananda explains that *Māyā* is not illusion as it is popularly interpreted. He states "*Māyā* is real, yet it is not real". It is real in that the Real is behind it and gives it its appearance of reality. That which is real in *Māyā* is the Reality in and through *Māyā*. Yet the Reality is never seen; and hence that which is seen is unreal, and it has no real independent existence of itself, but is dependent upon the Real for its existence. *Māyā* then is a paradox – real, yet not real; an illusion, yet not an illusion. He who knows the Real sees in *Māyā* not illusion, but reality. He who knows not the Real sees in *Māyā* the illusion and thinks it real (CW6, 1985 : 92).

Hence the Absolute is manifesting itself as many, through the veil of time, space and causation. Swami Vivekananda states (CW2, 1983 : 210–211): "We now see that all the various forms of cosmic energy, such as matter, thought, force, intelligence, and so forth, are simply the manifestations of that cosmic intelligence, or, the Supreme Lord. Everything that you see, feel, or hear, the whole universe, is His creation; or to be a little more accurate is His projection."

Swami Vivekananda's view of the relation between substance and quality, noumenon and phenomenon lends further evidence in support of the contention that for him the universe is a real manifestation of the Absolute in various forms. By substance is meant the unchanging ground and support of changing qualities. So also by noumenon is meant the immutable reality (ie. the Absolute), underlying the world of mutation and change (ie. the world of changing objects) which is called phenomenon. Swami Vivekananda is of the view that we cannot think of the substance as separate from the qualities; we cannot think of change and not-change at the same time; it would be impossible. But the very thing which is the substance is the quality; substance and quality are not two things. It is the unchangeable that is appearing as the changeable. The unchangeable substance of the universe, (the Absolute), is not something separate from it. The noumenon is not something different from the phenomenon, but it is the very noumenon (the Absolute) which has become the phenomena (the sensible universe) (CW2, 1983 : 344–345).

From the above it is evident that Swami Vivekananda gives a philosophical exposition of Sri Ramakrishna's teaching that Brahman and Shakti are non-different, *abheda*. What Swami Vivekananda calls the unchangeable substance of the universe or the noumenon is the same as Brahman, and what he calls the qualities or the phenomena are just the contents of the universe as a play of energies, powers and forces, in a word, Shakti. The Shakti is

sometimes called *Mahāmāyā* as the manifest universe of space, time and causation. Thus we may say that for Swami Vivekananda the universe as such is really a manifestation of Brahman. However, the fact remains that at times his thoughts switch off to the other pole from which he says that the universe is an apparent manifestation of Brahman. These seemingly conflicting statements are reconciled by Swami Vivekananda himself in his treatment of Advaita, Dvaita and other schools of thought (Chatterjee, 1963 : 271–272).

ADVAITA, VIŚĪSTADVAITA, DVAITA

Like Sri Ramakrishna, Swami Vivekananda is of the view that Advaita, Dvaita and Viśīstadvaita are all true and that ‘descriptions’ of Brahman given by them relate to the same reality. In Advaita, Brahman is *nirguna*, that is, devoid of quality and form. It is indeterminate and impersonal. But for Dvaita and Viśīstadvaita, Brahman has all good qualities. He is *saguna*, that is, with qualities. He is a Personal Being and as the omnipotent and omniscient creator, sustainer and destroyer of the world.

So also there are different conceptions of the world and of the soul and its liberation in Advaita, Viśīstadvaita and Dvaita.

In Advaita, the world is the product of *māyā*, an illusory creation of God’s magical power. The individual self as a limited person is also unreal. But the real self of man, the Atman in him is ever pure, free, infinite and immortal; it is the same *sat-cit-ananda* that Brahman is, and as such, it is Brahman itself. Its false association with the body through ignorance, *avidya*, is the root cause of bondage. Therefore moksha, liberation, is to be attained only through knowledge, *jñāna*, of the self as identical with Brahman. The performance of religious works (karma), or devotion to and worship of God (bhakti) do not lead to liberation. Of course karma and bhakti are important in so far as they purify the mind and generate in us the desire to know Brahman. But after that, ignorance can be removed and liberation attained only through knowledge of the Self or of Brahman (CW2, 1983 : 346–348).

According to Dvaita and Viśīstadvaita, the world is a real creation of Brahman by his wonderful, but real creative power. The world is, therefore, as real as Brahman. The individual soul, according to Dvaita and Viśīstadvaita, is a limited, finite being, though it is essentially conscious and eternal. It is not identical with, but different from Brahman, and is

completely dependent on Him. When through ignorance it identifies itself with the body and forgets God, it comes under bondage. Liberation from bondage cannot be attained through mere knowledge of God, self and the world. However, we must have true knowledge of them. But after we have the requisite knowledge, we must constantly remember God and love and worship Him. It is through such steadfast devotion to God, (karma and bhakti), that man receives God's grace; and it is God's grace that liberates man from bondage. Hence it is bhakti or devotion, combined with jñāna and karma (knowledge and work), what leads to liberation.

Swami Vivekananda in his Neo-Vedanta philosophy has brought about a reconciliation of Advaita, Viśiṣṭadvaita and Dvaita. According to him God is personal and impersonal at the same time (CW8, 1985 : 188). Even man may be said to be both personal and impersonal. We are personalised impersonal beings. If we use the word in the absolute sense, we are impersonal; but if we use it in a relative meaning, we are personal. The Impersonal according to Swami Vivekananda, is a living God, a principle. The difference between personal and impersonal is that the personal is only a man, and the impersonal idea is that He is the angel, the man, the animal, and yet something more, because Impersonality includes all personalities, is the sum total of everything in the universe and infinitely more besides (Chatterjee, 1963 : 274).

Swami Vivekananda's Advaita is not antagonistic to Dvaita and Viśiṣṭadvaita. These are accepted by him not in a patronising way, but with the conviction that they are true manifestations of the same truth, and that they all lead to the same conclusions as the Advaita has reached. As he states (Vivekananda, 1981 : 219): "The dualists and the Advaitist need not fight each other. Each has a place, and a great place in the national life. The dualist must remain for he is as much part and parcel of the national religious life as the Advaitist. One cannot exist without the other; one is the fulfilment of the other."

A reconciliation of Advaita, Dvaita and other schools of thought as made by Swami Vivekananda, rests on the recognition of different standpoints of knowledge and levels of human experience. From the different standpoints and levels we may have different views of the same thing, for example, the water of the ocean appears as blue when viewed from a distance but has no colour when held in the palm of the hand. The numerous views we have of things from different standpoints should be synthesized if we are to get a full view of the thing. These different views may sometimes be contrary and even contradictory. But we cannot reject any of these as false, since they are all based on genuine human experience.

The Advaitin's view of Brahman seems to be based on *nirvikalpa samādhi* in which there is only pure consciousness, but no particular form of consciousness, related to any particular object. In *nirvikalpa jñāna* there is a negation of all objects and even of the subjects of consciousness, and what remains is pure consciousness which simply is or exists and is, therefore, identical with pure existence. Hence on the basis of *nirvikalpa jñāna* we are to say that Reality as Brahman is impersonal existence – consciousness which is also peace or bliss, and that there is no world of objects, no other reality.

The Viśiṣṭadvaitins subscribe to the doctrine that Brahman is identity-in-difference. Brahman is the unity of the different selves and material objects of the phenomenal world. Brahman as the identity of these different constituents is the underlying substratum. Brahman, although different from the cosmos, controls and guards it. Brahman is thus the ruler and controller, *niyamaka*, of the world. Reality is like a person: the various selves and material objects are its body, and Brahman its soul. The world of variety and multiplicity, in so far as it is related to Brahman, is real, although not independently real. Individual selves and material objects are related to Brahman as parts to a whole. Each part is separate and yet not different in substance from the whole. Just as qualities are real but cannot exist independently of substance, so also the selves and objects are real as parts of ultimate reality but cannot exist independently of it (Puligandla, 1975 : 230).

The Dvaitin's view of Reality, on the other hand, is based on *savikalpa samādhi* in which the meditative consciousness takes the form of a subject as different from, but related to, the object of meditation. In *savikalpa jñāna* there is an affirmation of both the subject and the object as related to each other. So, on the basis of *savikalpa jñāna* we are to say that Reality or Brahman is a subject related to a real world of objects, that it is a Personal Being, the real creator of a real world of finite things and beings.

For Swami Vivekananda all of these views of Brahman being based on genuine spiritual experience, should be accepted as true of Brahman, the Ultimate Reality. However, there may be an alternation between these views in the life and teachings of some spiritual personages who sincerely believe in both. They may alternately pass from the one to the other and express themselves in the language of either, according to the needs and capacities of those whom they teach. Hence, they may sometimes speak the language of Advaita and sometimes that of Viśiṣṭadvaita or Dvaita resulting in apparent inconsistencies between their different statements. This is probably the

explanation for the apparent contradictions that one may find in the statements of Swami Vivekananda at different times and in different places. But these may be reconciled in the light of what has been said above (Chatterjee, 1963 : 274–275).

Swami Vivekananda also reconciles the different paths of liberation in his Neo-Vedantic Philosophy. The main principle of this reconciliation is given by him in his conception of Brahman. "The Vedantists", he says, "give no other attribute to God except these three – that He is Infinite Existence, Infinite Knowledge and Infinite Bliss", and he regards these three as One. Existence without knowledge and love cannot be; knowledge without love and love without knowledge cannot be. What we want is the harmony of Existence, Knowledge and Bliss Infinite. For that is our goal. We want harmony, not one-sided development. And it is possible to have the intellect of a Śāṅkara with the heart of a Buddha (Vivekananda, 1980 : 128).

Swami Vivekananda emphasized that we that we should give due recognition to all the paths leading to the goal of liberation. Instead of mere knowledge, *jñāna*, or mere love, *bhakti* or mere work, *karma*, Swami Vivekananda called for a combination of all in the ideal life and the ideal spiritual path. He stated that we should not confine ourselves to any one of them and ignore the rest, for they all touch the fibres of our being and appeal to our nature as spiritual beings. We cannot do away with any one of them. Both the heart and the head must be satisfied.

In his Neo-Vedantism, Swami Vivekananda combines *jñāna*, *karma*, *bhakti* and *raja yoga*. For him, the ideal man was one in whom all the elements of philosophy, mysticism, emotion and action were equally present in full. To become harmoniously balanced in all these four directions is his ideal of religion. And this ideal, according to Swami Vivekananda, is attained by *Yoga* or *Union*. To the worker, it is union between men and the whole of humanity; to the mystic, between his lower and higher self; to the lover, union between himself and the God of love; and to the philosopher, it is the union of all existence. This is what is meant by *yoga* and the man who seeks after this kind of union is called a *yogin*. Swami Vivekananda calls upon all to become *yogins*. He stated that it is imperative that all these various *yogas* should be carried out in practice; mere theories about them will not do any good. First we have to hear about them, then we have to think about them. We have to reason the thoughts out, impress them on our minds, and we have to meditate on them, realise them, until at last they become our whole life. No longer will religion remain a bundle of ideas or theories, an intellectual assent; it will enter into our very self (CW2, 1983 : 142–143).

While for Swami Vivekananda, an integrated cultivation of all these paths is the ideal of religion, he does however, admit that any one of the paths, if followed sincerely and entirely, will lead to the ultimate goal – moksha (Vivekananda, 1976 : 78–79). He states (Rolland, 1975 : 190): "Each one of our yogas – the yogas of work, of wisdom, and of devotion are all capable of serving as direct and independent means for the attainment of moksha".

PRACTICAL VEDANTA

One of the greatest contributions of Swami Vivekananda is his emphasis on the practical nature of Vedanta. In his numerous lectures he clearly shows how Vedanta was a practical philosophy in the past and that many of the Vedantic thoughts emanated from persons who lived the busiest lives in the world, namely, the ruling monarchs of ancient India. He also points out that the Bhagavad Gita, which is the quintessence of Vedanta philosophy, was taught to Arjuna by Sri Krishna on the battlefield of Kuruksetra. Swami Vivekananda maintained that the Vedanta, as a religion must be intensely practical. "We must be able to carry it out in every part of our lives. And not only this, the fictitious differentiation between religion and the life of the world must vanish, for the Vedanta teaches oneness – one life throughout" (CW2, 1983 : 291).

The central ideal of Vedanta is oneness. There are no two in anything, no two lives. There is but one life, one world, one existence. Everything is that One, the difference is in degree and not in kind. It is the same life that pulsates through all beings, from Brahman to the amoeba, the difference is only in the degree of manifestation. We must not look down with contempt on others. All of us are going towards the same goal. We have no right to look down with contempt upon those who are not developed exactly in the same degree as we are. Condemn none, if you can stretch out a helping hand, do so. If you cannot, fold your hands, bless your brothers and let them go their own way (CW2, 1983 : 299).

Swami Vivekananda maintained that Vedanta can be carried into our everyday life, the city life, the country life, the national life, and the hope life of every nation. For, if a religion cannot help man wherever he may be, wherever he stands, it is not of much use; it will remain only a theory for the chosen few. Religion, to help mankind, must be ready and able to help him in whatever condition he is, in servitude or in freedom, in the depths of degradation or on the heights of purity; everywhere, equally, it should be able to come to his aid (CW2, 1983 : 299–301). The principles of Vedanta, or the ideal of religion will be fulfilled by its capacity for performing this great function.

According to Swami Vivekananda Vedanta calls upon us to have faith in ourselves. All the difference between man and man is due to the existence or non-existence of faith in himself. Faith in ourselves will do everything. He is an atheist who does not believe in himself. The old religions said that he was an atheist who does not believe in God. The new religion says that he is the atheist who does not believe in himself. But it is not selfish faith, because the Vedanta, again, is the doctrine of oneness. It means faith in all because you are all. Love for yourself means love for all, for you are all one. It is the great faith which will make the world better. As Swami Vivekananda says (CW2, 1983 : 300–301): "He is the highest man who can say with truth, I know all about myself".

THE SELF (ATMAN)

The Vedanta declares that it is through the Self that you know everything, therefore "know thy self". Swami Vivekananda maintains that this is not impossible and impracticable, but quite a feasible and practical proposition. Your real Self is the abiding and constant consciousness, the standing witness in you, which observes all changes in your body and mind, but is not involved in them, rather, it stands above them. It is the pure immutable, unflickering light of consciousness in you which is also pure existence and is ever free and blissful. You are that *sat-cit-ananda*, not the small miserable being that you ignorantly think yourself to be. Your self is the universal self that is one with all things and beings, that shines in the sun, the moon and the stars and illumines them all (Chatterjee, 1963 : 279).

The Atman is first to be heard of "Hear day and night that you are the Soul. Repeat it to yourselves day and night till it enters into your very veins, till it tingles in every drop of blood, till it is in your flesh and bone. Let the whole body be full with that one ideal. "I am the birthless, the deathless, the blissful, the omniscient, the omnipotent, ever glorious soul" (CW2, 1983 : 302).

Swami Vivekananda calls on us to think of the Atman day and night, meditate on it constantly till the thought enters into our flesh and blood and we have a vision of the Atman as Brahman. Here we realise our real Self as none other than Brahman itself. With this realisation there comes a total transformation of our life and activities. We live the Vedantic ideal, it becomes a matter of our practical life.

The Vedanta asks us to find God in our Self and worship that God. Swami Vivekananda declares that there is nothing more practical than this. God is

not a Being far-off from us, hidden somewhere behind the clouds and seated on His exalted throne in a region far beyond. He is the Self in us. The Self is known to every one of us – man, woman, or child – and even to animals. Without knowing Him we can neither live nor move, nor have our being; without knowing this Lord of all, we cannot breathe or live a second. The God of the Vedānta is the most known of all and is not the outcome of imagination. Swami Vivekananda declares "If this is not a practical God, how else could you teach a practical God? Where is there a more practical God than He whom I see before me – a God omnipresent, in every being more real than our sense? (CW2, 1983 : 305).

For the Swami it is not the God in temples, in symbols and images that we are to worship; it is not the God in the high heaven whom we cannot see, that we are to worship. We are to worship the living God, whom we see before us and who is in everything we see. 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, especially the poor, the sick, the ignorant, the destitute, and the downtrodden, for the God in them wants our worship, our care and service. The Vedānta states that it is the greatest privilege in our lives that we are allowed to serve the Lord in all these shapes. "He who sees Śiva in the poor, in the weak, and in the diseased, really worships Śiva, and if he sees Śiva only in the image, his worship is but preliminary. He who has served and helped one poor man seeing Śiva in him, without thinking of his caste, or creed or race, or anything, with him Śiva is more pleased than with the man who sees Him only in temples (Thus Spake Vivekananda, 1975 : 73–74).

Neo-Vedānta visualises divinity in every walk of life. It reminds man that he is the spirit. Sri Ramakrishna's expression of "Jiva is Śiva" is a practical realisation of the spirit in man. His utterance of "Jiva is Śiva" was at once a revelation to Swami Vivekananda.

The practical side of Neo-Vedānta is to see God in everything, and as everything. The earth and the heaven, fire and sun, the moon, the stars and the water are all forms of Brahman. We are all children of the Immortal ever pure and ever free. Recognising this truth is the most practical of all worship. It has nothing to do with theorising and speculation. No doubt, the Vedānta says that each one must have his own path, but the path is not the goal. The worship of a God in heaven and all these things are not bad, but they are only steps towards the Truth and not the Truth itself. They are good and beautiful and some wonderful ideas are there, but the Vedānta says at every point "My friend, Him whom you are worshipping as an unknown I worship as Thee.

He whom you are worshipping as unknown and are seeking for, throughout the universe has been with you all the time. You are living through Him, and He is the Eternal Witness of the universe. He whom all the Vedas worship, He who is always present in the eternal 'I', He existing, the whole universe exists" (CW2, 1983 : 321).

The Vedanta teaches that we are not really the weak, sinful and miserable beings that we sometimes think ourselves to be, for the Vedanta recognises no sin, it only recognises error. And the greatest error, says the Vedanta, is to say that you are weak, that you are a sinner. Whosoever thinks he is weak is wrong (CW2, 1983 : 295). In the Vedanta there is no attempt at reconciling the present life – the hypnotised life – with real ideal; but this false life must go, and the real life which is always existing must manifest itself, must shine out. No man becomes purer and purer, it is a matter of greater manifestation. The veil drops away and the native purity of the soul begins to manifest itself. Everything is ours already – infinite purity, freedom, love and power.

The Vedanta also says that not only can this be realised in the depths of forests or caves, but by men in all possible conditions of life. Those who discovered these truths were neither living in caves nor forests, nor following the ordinary vocations of life, but men whom we have every reason to believe, led the busiest of lives, men who had to command armies, to sit on thrones and to look to the welfare of millions (CW2, 1983 : 295–296).

According to the Swami the highest prayer that the Advaita teaches is this: "Rise thou effulgent one, rise thou who art always pure, rise thou birthless and deathless, rise almighty and manifest thy true nature. These little manifestations do not befit thee (CW2, 1983 : 357). This is the one prayer, to remember our true nature, the God who is always within us, thinking of It always as infinite, almighty, ever-good, ever-beneficent, selfless, bereft of all limitations.

HUMANISM

Another vital practical side of Swami Vivekananda's Neo-Vedantism is the call for us to be first Gods, and then help others to be Gods. We should look upon every man, woman and everyone as God. As a Vedantin Swami Vivekananda firmly believes that all life is one. The life and existence of an individual is not separate, distinct and independent from that of others. As all individuals are sparks of the same Divine Force or Entity, all are free and

equal and one. Swami Vivekananda showed that no man is inferior to the other, no class has got special qualification over the other. The Vedantic spirit of oneness makes the individual identify himself with the community and serve it with a service motive without any personal gain. "The individual's life is in the life of the whole, the individual's happiness is in the happiness of the whole, apart from the whole, the individual's existence is inconceivable – this is an eternal truth and is the bed-rock on which the universe is built" (CW4, 1985 : 463). Swami Vivekananda maintained that individual liberation is incomplete without the total liberation of mankind. He declared "I believe in God, and I believe in man. I believe in helping the miserable. I believe in going even to hell to save others. I do not believe in a God or religion which cannot wipe the widow's tears or bring a piece of bread to the orphan's mouth. However sublime be the theories, however well-spun may be the philosophy – I do not call it religion so long as it is confined to books and dogmas" (CW5, 1985 : 50–52).

Romain Rolland sums up Swami Vivekananda's humanism thus (1975 : 129): "It was wonderful that he (Vivekananda) kept in his feverish hands to the end the equal balance between the two poles : a burning love of the Absolute (The Advaita) and the irresistible appeal of suffering humanity. And what makes him so appealing to us is that at those times when equilibrium was no longer possible and he had to make a choice, it was the latter that won the day." The oppressed, exploited and tyrannised were his Gods and the destitute and ignorant were his Śiva.

Swami Vivekananda's humanism advocates that man who is an end in himself must also become a means to serve humanity. "The only God to worship is the human soul in the human body. Of course all animals are temples too, but man is the highest, the Taj Mahal of temples" (CW2, 1983 : 321). Man himself is the subject, the object, the end and the means. It is for this reason that some critics have called Neo-Vedanta also as Humanistic Advaitism, *Manavadvaita* (Mishra, 1971 : 20). Thus humanity is Swami Vivekananda's God and social service his religion.

For Swami Vivekananda the happiness and welfare of all is based on promoting freedom and equality of all. Thus his concept of equality fosters fellowship and unity among individuals and nations. Swami Vivekananda laid emphasis on social unity for social-economic upliftment of the people. He was of the view that mere unity in society is fictitious unless it is accompanied by the desire to uplift the down-trodden. The desire to uplift others becomes well-established only when the lower self of the individual is

erased and community consciousness promoted. Swami Vivekananda aimed to regain the strength and freedom of India by means of practical Vedanta. He was of the view that "Vedanta is the necessity of the age." He hoped that Vedanta would percolate into every walk of national life. He stated "These conceptions of the Vedanta must come out, must remain not only in the forests, not only in the cave, but they must come out to work at the bar and the bench, in the fishermen that are catching fish, and with the students that are studying" (CW3, 1979 : 245).

India's misery, poverty, ignorance and servitude allowed Swami Vivekananda no rest. Internally he worked tirelessly to free India from social evils like caste rigidity, untouchability and the mass illiteracy by spreading sacred and secular education. He warned that India must give up her exclusive outlook and must become an equal to other nations in the exchange of knowledge. Thus he interpreted Vedanta in terms understandable both to the West and the India of his own times. By so doing he showed that India had within herself the intellectual means to her own emancipation.

VEDANTIC UNIVERSALISM

An important practical aspect of Swami Vivekananda's Neo-Vedanta is acceptance, not mere tolerance of other forms of worship. According to it, other forms of worship, including the worship of God through ceremonials and forms, are not in error. It is the journey from truth to truth, from lower truth to higher truth. Truth is nobody's property, no race, no individual can lay any exclusive claim to it. Truth is the nature of all souls (CW2, 1983 : 358). Swami Vivekananda, like his Master Sri Ramakrishna, stated that we should see others with eyes of love, with sympathy, knowing that they are going along the same path that we have trod. The Neo-Vedanta not only tolerates but accepts and respects other religions of the world as but different paths that lead to the same goal – God. Swami Vivekananda says "all religions are different forces in the economy of God, working for the good of mankind" (CW1, 1984 : 366). He further states: "We Hindus do not merely tolerate, we unite ourselves with every religion, praying in the mosque of the Muslim, worshipping before the fire of the Zoroastrian, and kneeling to the cross of the Christian. We know that all religions alike, from the lowest fetishism to the highest absolutism, are but so many attempts of the human soul to grasp and realise the Infinite. So we gather all these flowers, and, binding them together with the cord of love, make them into a wonderful bouquet of worship" (CW1, 1984 : X). To the heart of Swami Vivekananda, none was foreign or alien. For him, there existed only Humanity and Truth.

Of the universalism preached and practised by Swami Vivekananda and his Master, Ninian Smart (1968 : 71) states: "It is therefore important to recognise that the universalist message of Swami Vivekananda, and of his Master Ramakrishna, genuinely represents a new departure in world religions – the attempt to make the highest form of Hindu a world faith. In doing so, the Vedanta would cease to be the highest form of Hinduism as such; but it would become the highest form of religion in general."

CONCLUSION

It is evident that Swami Vivekananda's Neo-Vedanta is a living, practical Vedanta and not a dry and dead theory. Satischandra Chatterjee (1963 : 281) states of the Neo-Vedantism of Swami Vivekananda: "It is the Vedanta of the forests come back to our home, our city and our society; it is the Vedanta entering into our ordinary life and conduct, it is the Vedanta that may inspire our individual life, social life and national and international life." Indeed it was this Neo-Vedanta philosophy, inspired by Sri Ramakrishna, which Swami Vivekananda used so effectively during his short but brilliant life to rejuvenate faith and strength in the individual and society.

REFERENCES

Monographs

- Chatterjee, S, Swami Vivekananda's Neo-Vedanta and its Practical Application, in: Majumdar, R C (ed.), *Swami Vivekananda Centenary Memorial Volume*, Calcutta, Swami Vivekananda Centenary, 1963.
- Gambhirananda, Swami, *Eight Upanishads*, Calcutta, Advaita Ashrama, Vol 1, 1957; Vol 2, 1982.
- Nath, R C, *The New Hindu Movement*, Calcutta, Minerva, 1982.
- Puligandla, R, *Fundamentals of Indian Philosophy*, New York, Abingdon Press, 1975.
- Reddy, A V R, *The Political Philosophy of Swami Vivekananda*, New Delhi, Sterling Publishers, 1984.
- Rolland, R, *The Life of Vivekananda*, Calcutta, Advaita Ashrama, 1975.

Smart, N, Swami Vivekananda as a Philosopher, in: Ghanananda, Swami and Parrinder, G (eds), *Swami Vivekananda in East and West*, London, Ramakrishna Vedanta Centre, 1968.

Vivekananda, Swami, *Thus Spake Vivekananda*, Madras, Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1975.

Vivekananda, Swami, *Hinduism*, Madras, Sri Ramakrishna Math, 1976.

Vivekananda, Swami, *Bhakti Yoga*, Calcutta, Advaita Ashrama, 1978.

Vivekananda, Swami, *Jñāna Yoga*, Calcutta, Advaita Ashrama, 1980.

Vivekananda, Swami, *Selections from Swami Vivekananda*, Calcutta, Advaita Ashrama, 1981.

Vivekananda, Swami, *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Mayavati Memorial Edition, Calcutta, Advaita Ashram, Vol 1, 1984; Vol 2, 1984; Vol 3, 1979; Vol 4, 1985; Vol 5, 1985; Vol 6, 1985; Vol 7, 1986; Vol 8, 1985.

Journal

Mishra, L P, Main Characteristics of Neo-Vedantic Movement, in: *Prabuddha Bhārata*, January 1971, Calcutta, Advaita Ashrama.

SWAMI VIVEKANANDA'S IMPACT ON INDIAN HISTORY

S Rajamani*

The nineteenth century was the period in which the British consolidated their colonial grip over their Indian possessions. Although they had the bitter experience of the 1857 mutiny which nearly shook them to their foundations, they were able to recover by bringing the governance of the country directly under the rule of the crown as it was felt that the East India Company directors could not be trusted with running the country. Hence was started a change in policy which included direct control of the entire population by well trained administrators. One of them, Macaulay, analyzed the failure of the Company in bringing about the order (that is essential for building up of a modern society) of course in conformity with his perceptions. He therefore decided to institute a system of education that was to create an army of petty officials to assist the ruling British officials. For this he devised school and university education based on the English language and syllabi conforming to that prevailing in England. He also declared, while formulating this policy, that it would be easier to persuade the Indian subjects of the Crown to become Christians which would make the job of holding on to the empire, which they had almost lost during the mutiny, a lot easier. The Government then actively encouraged the influx of Missionaries into the country from various parts of the world especially from America and Europe aside from, of course, England. The enormous resources at the disposal of the churches in the entire West was fully utilised to bring about a change in the religious persuasion of the indigenous population, duly encouraged by the British administration in India at all levels right down to the villages. There are instances of very active and aggressive proselytising methods used by the various church establishments inside the country.

While the encouragement to the churches was done in subtle ways, the proposed education system was established very earnestly right from 1857 with the founding of the three Universities of Calcutta, Madras and Bombay

* MA candidate, Department of Hindu Studies, University of Durban-Westville

and later at other centers like Allahabad etc. The response of the public for the missionary influx was negative while they took to the educational scheme with great zeal. There was a steady increase in the number of educational institutions especially in the private sector which produced a crop of educated young men who gravitated towards employment in the Government offices, courts, Universities etc. All this produced an intermingling of educated young people and a general awakening in the field of religion, society and politics. While many took to the western modes of thinking and living, a few took to the re-examination of values in all spheres of life in the light of the English education that gave them a new questioning outlook. Among these young men was one called Narendranath who later became the famous Swami Vivekananda.

Narendranath studied science for his graduation but left his college with a disturbed mind as a result of the challenges his inquiring nature faced in the field of religion. He first went to the leaders of the Brahma Samaj who were engaged in reforming Hindu religious practices which had only a limited appeal as their teachings could attract only the educated elite. His search for one who could dispel his doubts led him to Sri Ramakrishna, the priest at Dakshineswar Kali temple. At the feet of this great master he was able to find answers to the questions he sought. The master, seeing the brilliance of this youngster, directed him to the service of religion and society in India which were both in a degraded state after a thousand years of foreign rule.

To study the situation in the country first hand, Swamiji toured the country a number of times and addressed innumerable discerning young people at many gatherings in the Universities and elsewhere. We are fortunate in having a record of his many speeches which portray the young *sanyasin* repeatedly telling his audience not to rest content with what they have achieved for their own personal end but to seriously think and act on behalf of their own countrymen who were in a degraded state of poverty, both materially and morally. But he always prefaced his speeches in India by pointing to the greatness of Indian culture. Thus speaking in Madras in 1897 he says, " This is the ancient land, where wisdom made its home before it went into any other country... our ancestors were great... look back as far as you can, drink deep of the eternal fountains that are behind, and after that look forward, march forward and make India brighter, greater, much higher, than she ever was... There have been periods of decay and degradation; such periods have been necessary.. out of this decay is coming the India of the future." Writing about Swamiji Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of independent India says, "Rooted in the past, and full of pride in India's heritage, Vivekananda was yet modern in his approach to life's problems,

and was a kind of bridge between the past and her present". Nehru grew up at the time when Swamiji's ideas were widely prevalent.

Swamiji's inspired speeches found an echo in the hearts of the young youth who became aware of the need to take up a revolutionary reformation of society at all levels. The placid acceptance of the status quo went through a cataclysmic change. Many jumped into various reform movements in politics, society and religion. Life has not been the same in India ever since.

POLITICS

Swamiji's heart was in religion though he took up science as his subject in his college days. It was this scientific temper that he brought to bear in his quest for a religious deliverance. In fact after his initiation by the great master he expressed a desire to achieve *nirvikalpa samādhi*. Preferring the company of Ramakrishna and his disciples, he sang the praise of the Absolute whenever the opportunity arose, delved into the study of the *Upanishads* and very nearly gave up all family ties. But the master had other plans for his star pupil. 'You are a selfish person, Naren,' Ramakrishna chided this pupil. 'Do not take a course that will benefit only you. You are meant for humanity, to the people of India, the downtrodden, the poor, those who need spiritual training and solace urgently. So try to see life around you and improve the lives of people who are being misled by false ideologies imported from the west'. As Vivekananda accepted Ramakrishna as a divine incarnation he slowly brought himself around to follow the path shown by him.

The Indian National Congress was founded in 1885 and started attracting the new generation of educated youth of the country. Initially congressman assembled every year and passed resolutions petitioning the crown for a better life for its loyal subjects. And every year without fail they were to pass the final inevitable resolution – that of their unstinting allegiance to the crown. In 1891, Swamiji, who had been contemplating a life of solitude in the Himalayas, decided on the eventful journey which took him on an extensive tour of the country which he loved paving the way for much of his later work. As Romain Rolland dramatically puts it: This was the great departure.

Like a diver he plunged into the ocean of India, and the Ocean of India covered its tracks.... "There was no single hour of his life when he was not brought into contact with the sorrows, the desires, the abuses, the misery and

the feverishness of living men, rich and poor, in town and the field; he became one with their lives." From then on India became his one concern, his great obsession.

He met the untouchable and the Maharajah with equal felicity and told them about the greatness of Bharat and the pathetic state it had come to. He urged the young people to study, not religion, but the science of the west, worship the Daridra Narāyana, the poorest of the poor who needed their immediate attention. After five years of wandering he sat on a rock island at Cape Comarin, now Kanyakumari, some distance away from the shore, and meditated on what his master had said, "An empty stomach is no good for religion. That these people are leading the life of brutes is simply due to ignorance. We as a nation, have lost our individuality, and that is the cause of all the mischief in India. We have to give back to the nation its lost individuality and raise the masses". (From D.S. Sarma's biographical sketch of Swamiji). He thereafter dedicated himself to the service of India, particularly to the starving, oppressed and outcast millions. Even though he was to spend the next three years in America, his thoughts were with his motherland. His trip to the USA gave him enormous prestige at home. On arrival, fresh from his experiences in the West and impressed with the West's enormous progress in economics, politics, science and social life, he decided to prepare the youth of India to work for the upliftment of their impoverished countrymen, both in terms of education and in terms of improving their social conditions.

In spite of his very short life Swamiji was able to accomplish many of his desires to a large extent. Significantly he called the magazine he started: **PRABUDDHA BHARATA**, which meant Awakened India. By the beginning of the 20th century, Swamiji's zealous mission of rejuvenating India had a telling effect on the political life of the land. There was an awakening and a keen awareness for engagement in politically oriented activity. The revolutionaries from Bengal and elsewhere decided on violent attacks against the British in India and many more youth came under the leadership of great men like Bal Gangadhar Tilak, B.C.Pal, C.R.Das, Aurobindo, Lala Lajpat Rai etc. The Indian National Congress was growing in strength and a deep seated zeal for plunging into active politics was created amongst the educated which paved the way for the advent of Mahatma Gandhi into Indian politics. Even though the Congress was to pass the resolution for a complete break with Britain only at the time of its session in 1929, under the presidentship of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, the seed for this denouement was sown by Swamiji forty years earlier by his prodigious efforts. Swami

Vivekananda had a large part to play in planting the seeds of independent thinking and in creating a pride in India's past amongst the youth.

It could be said that there were others in the field such as the Brahmo Samaj, the Arya Samaj, the Theosophical Society and others working along the same lines; but their influence was peripheral and limited to a few individuals or sections of society. But one can boldly assert that it was the vision of Swamiji and the institutions he created such as the Ramakrishna Mission, which indirectly paved the way for the resurgence of independent India. But for his prodigious efforts, it would be difficult to imagine India achieving its political goal as it did.

SOCIETY

While bemoaning the condition of the masses as compared to that of the West, he also noted the lack of freedom and low status given to women. One of the first tasks he gave to the English follower of his, Sister Nivedita, was on educating young girls in both traditional and modern values through establishing schools exclusively meant for them. He was therefore a pioneer in women's education in India when society was totally opposed to the influx of western ideas among its women. Under his inspiration and guidance R K Missions all over India began constructing schools and colleges in which girls found easy admittance. He took pity on the masses for clinging to the pernicious caste system, however much it might have been a pillar of Hindu society down the ages, protecting its scriptures and culture against foreign onslaughts. It is to his great credit that he encouraged young people, irrespective of sect or caste, to join the R K order which dealt a big blow to orthodoxy. He was one of the foremost of the critics of untouchability. He asked: "Are the laws of Manu going to be rehabilitated as of yore? Or is the discrimination of food, prescribed and forbidden, varying in accordance with geographical dimensions, as it is in the present day, alone going to have its all powerful domination over the length and breadth of the country? Is the caste system to remain, and is it going to depend eternally upon the birthright of a man, or is it going to be determined by his qualification? And again in that caste system, is the discrimination of food, its touchableness and untouchableness, dependent upon the purity or the impurity of the man who touches it, to be observed as it is in Bengal or will it assume a form more strict as it does in Madras?" Writing further in an article written in 1899 he stipulates that the tremendous power that Europe unleashed in "vivifying the whole world" should be acquired. "We want that energy, that love of independence, that spirit of self-reliance, that immovable fortitude, that

dexterity in action, that bond of unity and purpose that thirst for improvement." That he exemplified this by his own example of wearing himself out in the service of Indian society, is part of Indian history. Thus one can say again, that Swami Vivekananda was a pioneering force in the great social movement in Indian in line with such great social reformers like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar and others.

RELIGION

Perhaps more enduring, but sadly unrecognised, is his contribution in the field of religion. Missionaries were halted in their tracks. Vicious propaganda against Hindus turned mute after his advent. Orthodoxy took a back seat and a scientific outlook, not unfamiliar to Hinduism, but kept suppressed due to the exigencies of the foreign rule of over 1000 years now emerged. Twentieth century Hindu religious history began to reflect an unequalled rationalistic strain. Conservatism of the theological kind was squarely condemned and blind acceptance of priestly authority was given up. From the time Vivekananda completed his 'speaking tours' through the entire nation, the relevance of true religion was debated at educational institutions, through the media and in literature produced in the country. But this change in attitude was tempered by Swamiji's caution that a modern outlook does not mean rejecting the old outright. After delving into the writings of Swamiji on religion, Romain Roland, the Nobel Laureate, in his introduction to his book on Swamiji says: "The man whose image I here evoke was the consummation of two thousand years of the spiritual life of three hundred million people". He further states: "From first to last, this great movement has been one of the cooperation on a footing of complete equality between the West and the East between the powers of reason and those, not of faith in the sense of blind acceptance, but vital and penetrating intuition .. From this magnificent procession of spiritual heroes, I have chosen" to write on Swami Vivekananda " who has won my regard because, with incomparable charm and power .. he has realised this splendid symphony of the Universal Soul..". Like Shankara before him Swamiji restored to religion its rightful place in the life of India. Many volumes could be written on this subject but for want of space we conclude with the statements made by some contemporary great minds on Swamiji: **The Mahatma** : Vivekananda's words do not need introduction from anybody. They make their own irresistible appeal. Tagore : If you want to understand India, study Vivekananda. In him, everything is positive, nothing negative. President Sukarno : Swami Vivekananda! What a name! He was one of the men who gave so much inspiration to me. Swami Ranganathananda : Swamiji is the embodiment of India's Universality.

Arnold Toynbee, the British Historian, after studying Ramakrishna-Vivekananda philosophy writes:

"This twentieth century had a Western beginning; but if the world is to survive, it must have an Indian ending".

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Romain Rolland *Life of Swami Vivekananda*, Ramakrishna Mission, Calcutta.

Prof D.S.Sharma Biographical sketch in Bhavan's hand out.

Swami Ranganathanda *Eternal Values For A Changing Society* Swami Vivekananda and the Future of India

{All the three books from Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, Bombay.}

Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda.

Life of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda Ramakrishna Mission, Calcutta.

Swamiji's Address at the World Parliament of Religions, Ramakrishna Centre Avoca, Durban.