

## **Practice of Vedānta in Vivekānandian Thought**

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Neo-Vedāntism means the new Vedānta as distinguished from the old traditional Vedānta developed by Śankarācārya; Śankara's philosophy is known as Advaita or non-dualism, pure and simple. So it is some times called Kevalādvaita or unqualified monism. It may also be called abstract monism in so far as Brahman, the ultimate reality, is devoid of all qualities and distinctions (nirguṇa and nirviśeṣa). The Neo-vedānta is also Advaita in as much as it holds that Brahman, the ultimate reality is one without a second. But as distinguished from the traditional Advaita of Śankara, it is a synthetic Vedānta which reconciles Dvaita or dualism and Advaita or non-dualism and also other theories of reality. So also it maybe called concrete monism in so far as it holds that Brahman is both qualified and qualityless, it has forms and is also formless.

When thinking on the practical application of a highly abstract philosophy as vedāntism as a Neo-vedāntin Vivekānanda points out certain historical facts which clearly show how Vedānta was practical philosophy in the past. Many of the Vedāntic thoughts emanated from persons who lived the bussiest lives in the world, mainly the ruling monarchs of ancient India. The best parts of the Vedānta philosophy he thinks were not the outcome of meditation in the forests only, but were thought out and expressed by brains which were bussiest in the everyday affairs of life. He points that there is the amazing fact that the Bhagavatgīta which is the quintenescence of Vedānta philosophy, was

tought to Arjuna by Srikrishna in the battlefield of Kurukṣetra. All this create a strong presumption that Vedānta can even now be a practical philosophy. This was the concept of swami Vivekānanda. He says “the action should be reconciled to the ideal, the present life should be made to coincide with life eternal.”<sup>1</sup>

The central ideal of Vedānta is oneness. Focussing this Vivekānanda expressed his views on practical Vedānta thus: “There are no two things, 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.”<sup>2</sup> it is the same life that pulsates through all beings, from Brahma to the amoeba, the difference is only in the manifestation. One must not look down with contempt on others but should respect them. All are moving towards the same goal. One should help others to reach the goal, and never do anything that may hurt them or obstruct them. He says “Vedānta can be carried into our everyday life, the city life, the country life, the national life, and the home life of every nation.”<sup>3</sup> A religion that cannot be put into practice, that cannot help man, wherever he may be, is not of much use and value. Judged by this Vedanta will be found practical.

Vedānta asks to know oneself and have faith in the other selves. Vivekānanda introduces a fresh thought that; the old religions said that, he was an atheist who does not believe in God. The new Vedānta teaches that he is an atheist who did not believe in himself. But that faith is not in the little, limited self which stands opposed to other selves. It is faith in the universal self, the self that is in himself, that is in all, because he is all. Love for yourselves mean love for all. One is first to hear about this self and then constantly meditate on it. Think of oneself as the birth less, the death less, the blissful, the omniscient, and the omnipotent, ever glorious soul. Think on it day and night till

the thoughts enter into one's flesh and blood and he has a vision of the Atman as Brahman. Here he realizes his real self as none other than Brahman itself. With this realization, there comes a total transformation of one's life and his activities. He lives the Vedāntic ideal; it becomes a matter of his practical life.

Vivekānanda says, "The self is known therefore, to everyone of us, man, woman, child and even animals. Without knowing him, we can neither live or move, nor have our being, without knowing the Lord of all. We cannot breathe or live a second. The God of Vedānta is the most known of all and is not the outcome of imagination."<sup>4</sup>

The real practical side of Vedānta is to see God in everything as everything. The earth and heaven, fire and the sun, the moon, the stars and the water are all forms of Brahman. All men and women and even animals are forms of Brahman.

According to Vivekānanda another practical side of Vedānta philosophy is the call to men to be first gods, and then look upon every man, woman everyone as God. So they are really to serve them and not help them. If it be the good fortune to help any one of them, one should do it only as worship. The poor and the miserable give him opportunity to serve God, in the person of the diseased the lunatic, the leper, and the sinner. Vivekānanda says, " may I be born again and again and suffer thousands of miseries, so that I may worship the only God that exists, the only God I believe in, the sum total of all soul and above all, my God wicked, my God the miserable, my God the poor of all races, of all species, in the special object of my worship."<sup>5</sup>

Another practical side of Vedānta philosophy, according to Vivekānanda is, acceptance, not mere tolerance of other forms of

worship, including the worship of God through ceremonies and forms, are not an error. It is the journey from truth, from lower truth to higher truth. We should see others with the eyes of love, with sympathy, knowing that they are going along the same path that we have to reach God. The philosophy of Vivekānanda not only tolerates but accepts and respects other religions of the world as but different paths that lead to the same goal-God.

According to him, Vedānta is a living philosophy. It is Vedanta of the forests come back to the homes, the city, and the society. It is the Vedānta entering in ordinary life and contact. It is the Vedānta that may inspire individual life, social life and national life.

Swāmi Vivekānanda wanted everyone to acquire strength, beauty, power, dignity and be a truly human being. The best way to reach the goal is the service of mankind. He inculcated a religion of humanity. His religion was a religion which looked upon all human beings as kindred, as belonging to one family. It is a religion of man making or humanistic. He is in complete agreement with the supreme value of comparison. Vivekānanda says "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 the heights of purity. Everywhere, equally, it should be able to come to his aid. The principles of Vedānta, or the ideal of religion or whatever you may call it will be fulfilled by its capacity for performing this great function."<sup>6</sup>

In Vivekānanda's concept, when man develops sensitivity and respect for the divinity in him, he develops a sense of holiness and his reverence towards fellow beings increases. Then alone can all economic, political and social disturbances cease to exist. Religion or philosophy whether preached by church, mosque or temple, cultivates in man this

self-reverence. The seeker is taught to perceive a greater reality and divine presence in one and all.

For Vivekānanda, the real nature of man is spiritual. The ignorance of his original inherent dormant divinity makes him feel miserable, limited and helpless. Vivekānanda says, 'Teach everyone of his real nature, call upon the spiritual soul and see how it awakes, power will come, goodness will come, purity will come, when the sleeping soul is roused to selfconscious activity.'<sup>7</sup> Though Vivekānanda is not against material development, he is against any determinism imposed by economic or any social activity in the quest of human perfection. He believed that society would at its perfection when the highest truth becomes practical. For him Vedānta philosophy teaches that man should give up all the ideas of manifoldness and differences and asserts that the whole universe is but the expression of one supreme reality. When oneness of the existence is realized, then all the evil ideas and negativities of the mind would automatically vanish and the soul would enjoy eternal peace, harmony, concord and happiness.

Marie Lewis Burke observes, "Now to this person, this ordinary person, Swami Vivekānanda had a revolutionary message. It was not a message basically different from that which he gave to those monastic and non-monastic, who were consciously seeking for God or aspiring wholeheartedly to reach a suprasensuous level of perception and existence. It was not a wanted-down version of a lofty philosophy; it was lofty. It was not a cushioned couch on which one could relax, secure in the knowledge that all was well in heaven and on earth. On the contrary it blew the ordinary man sky high, and if he listened, it changed him forever. Since Swami Vivekānanda gave his life to pour

that message with the full force of his tremendous personality into the soul of ordinary men and women, infusing it into the marrow of their bones, they were bound to listen. Sooner or later, that message, which will resound for centuries around the world, will be heard by everyone, everywhere.”<sup>8</sup> According to Vivekānanda, each and every human being has the same right to practise the philosophy of Vedānta.

Vivekānanda’s intense humanism is also found expression in his doctrine of practical Vedānta. Vedānta in the past was practical only for sages who sought salvation by self realization. But Vivekānanda maintained that the fundamental doctrine of Vedānta namely the basic Divinity of the jiva has a message for man is all stations of life. It can be an instrument for the re-education of the ego in to a new consciousness of one’s inherent strength and then promote men’s self confidence and power of self expression. Next, practical Vedānta conveys the teaching that man is the best symbol for the worship of the deity. While Vivekānanda accepted prayer to the deity and adoration of aim in temples and through meditation on him. As an essential part of the religion, he stressed that an equally important aspect of worship lies in the service of God in man Thus true Vedānta can workout a programme of education, health, social uplift etc. as worship of God.

### **References**

1. C.W.S.V, Vol-III, Mayavati Edition, pp-182,183.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid, p- 183.
4. Ibid.

5. Vivekananda Swami, Thoughts of power, R.K.M, Madras, p-29.
6. C.W.S.V, Mayavati Edition, Vol-II, pp-330,331.
7. C.W.S.V, Mayavati Edition, Vol-III, p- 193.
8. Marie Louise burke, Living Wisdom (ed), p-260.