



SWAMI VIVEKANANDA AND STRUCTURAL DEPTHS OF HUMAN BEING

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Introduction

Man has always been an enigma to himself. In spite of his continuous efforts to understand himself, both as a subject and an object, the mystery of human life still remains a mystery with many questions unanswered. In the study of man, the *knower* and the *known* are one, in which the object of science is the human being himself and the apparatus used are his own body, mind and intellect. The subject of the study of man is a vast field covering many spheres of knowledge that have evolved over centuries. In the present age of *humanism*, the focus of the thinkers all over the world appears to have shifted from God, matter and science to **man**. This is so as the predicaments of modern times have pushed them to recognize the necessity of delving into structural depths of human being. It is therefore imperative to give a relook to the concept of man and to understand him keeping as the backdrop of all his activities, scientific, social, political, ethical and spiritual.

Problem

The present age is the age of humanism which holds that man should be the chief concern and centre of all activities and thinking. Through science and technology man has attained great prosperity and power, and modern methods of communication and travel have shrunken the human society into a 'global village'. It cannot be described to note that despite all these successes, degradation of man has also been going on apace in geometric progression, as witnessed by the enormous increase in broken homes, immorality, violence, crime, terrorism, etc., in modern society.

“Strange as it may seem, this I is shrouded in mystery, rooted in obscurity and more ignorant of itself than of anything else in the world around it. Yet man is not naturally conscious of this ignorance; such consciousness comes to him only when he starts to become curious about his sense of identity and to think about himself. Then his chief puzzle becomes himself, rivaling that of the Sphinx, and his greatest problem likewise himself. Whenever he has the courage and initiative to question life and keep on questioning it, to interpret his human experience without previous preconceptions he will be amazed at his inability to understand the Truth, the full truth concerning his relation as an individual to the great Life-Force in which all things live, move and have their being and of which he himself is but a single expression.”¹



Objective

Great philosophers, eminent personalities of all nations accept that through spiritual aptitude alone the problems of man can be solved at the individual as well as at the global level. Human life blooms best when it is profoundly open to the divine. Human life is unhappy, incomplete and even destructive without the spiritual dimension.

In this age of scientific and technological civilization, where everything is measured in terms of pragmatic results and quick remedies, man is hardly in possession of the art of self-enquiry, the result of which is that our contemporary human society faces an alarming debasement of values. It naturally paves the way for the spirit of unhealthy competition, envy, greed, jealousy, prejudice, selfishness and discontentment among men. What is truly needed today is a moral and spiritual regeneration of man along with his far-reaching material progressions. To make it clear, one can firmly specify that our cultural and social milieu demand an inner transformation of man, that may lead to culminate in a qualitative improvement of mankind as a whole.

The task of the philosopher today is to enkindle in the minds of modern man an intuitive perception of his true nature and potentialities, and also of the meaning and purpose of his life. It is here that the study of Swami Vivekananda gains importance as he made man-making, the mission of his life. The exposition of his humanistic philosophy based on the Vedantic ideal of the oneness of existence and the potential divinity of man restores the dignity and blessedness of human beings. It gives one the strength to face the problems of life, the power of self-reliance and fearlessness. It can also usher a new social order based on love, equality and service.

Relevance of the study of Man in Swami Vivekananda's light

“My ideal, indeed, can be put in a few words, and that is to preach unto mankind their divinity, and how to make it manifest in every movement of life.”²

Swami Vivekananda holds that deep abiding faith in our innate divinity is the surest way to make our life dynamic. We suffer terribly from a deep sense of insecurity. *This alienation from our innate divinity has caused in us restlessness and confusion. We can remould ourselves to attain glory in our life only if we can discover our spiritual consciousness.* That is why the role of faith is immense in our lives. Napoleon says, “All the scholastic scaffolding falls as a ruined edifice before one single word, ‘faith’.” Vivekananda repeatedly dinned into our ears his message, “The history of the world is the history of a few men who had faith in themselves. That faith calls our divinity within. You can do anything, you fail only when you do not strive sufficiently to manifest this infinite power. As soon as a man or a nation loses faith, death comes.”

Swami Vivekananda's concept of man based on neo-Vedanta

In Vedanta, a human being finds the highest place in the scheme of religious



and philosophical discussions. All of them aim at one and the only goal, the manifestation of divinity already in man. Vedanta declares that all humanistic concerns will be taken care of only when man understands the transcendental existence in him. In other words, discover our spiritual potential nature, it can guarantee man's true dignity and worth to a human being in the real sense.

According to Swami Vivekananda, there is no conflict between sacred and secular. Both are complimentary to each other. Religion is not a separate pursuit divorced from the humdrum of life. On the other hand, it envelops the whole life. The way man looks at himself and his conception of his own nature, governs all his other concepts. The value of the reorientation of man's view of himself extends from individual in the development of his character to the humanity as a whole. This re-orientation of man's view of himself results in a new kind of holistic awareness where the so-called distinction between the religious and secular vanishes. Referring to this approach Sister Nivedita in her introduction to the Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda says: "...No distinction, henceforth, between sacred and secular. To labour is to pray. To conquer is to renounce. Life is itself religion. To have one to hold is as stern a trust as to quit and to avoid." "This is the realisation which makes Vivekananda the great nature of Karma, not as divorced from, but as expressing Jnana and Bhakti. To him, the workshop, the study, the farmyard, and the field are as true and fit scenes for the meeting of God with man as the cell of the monk or the door of the temple."³

Through his doctrine of the potential divinity of all beings, Swami Vivekananda sought to bring a radical transformation in the society. To quote Nivedita again, "His prime concern was vindication of humanity, never abandoned, never weakened, always rising to new heights of defense of the undefended, of the chivalry of the weak."

And also Swami Vivekananda viewed man as a multi-levelled being, composite of physical, mental, emotional, intellectual and spiritual faculties. In the name of spirituality he never neglected the other faculties of a man. He is of the opinion that when man is able to integrate all the faculties, he attains the manhood in its entirety. "Make your nerves strong. What we want is muscles of iron and nerves of steel. We have wept long enough. No more weeping, but stand on your feet and be men. It is a man-making religion that we want. It is man-making theories that we want. It is man-making education all round that we want,"⁴ was the strong call of Swami Vivekananda

The faculty of reason should be cultivated to harness the full potential of being human. Swami Vivekananda says: "Why was reason given us if we have to believe? Is it not tremendously blasphemous to believe against reason? What right have we not to use the greatest gift that God has given to us? I am sure God will pardon a man who will use his reason and cannot believe, rather than a man who believes blindly instead of using the faculties He has given him."⁵

However Swami Vivekananda never failed to point out the temporariness of material things and the permanence of Spiritual Reality. In this regard he says thus:



“Spiritual knowledge is the only thing that can destroy our miseries for ever; any other knowledge satisfies our wants only for a time. It is only with the knowledge of the spirit that the faculty of want is annihilated for ever; so helping man spiritually is the highest help that can be given to him. He who gives man spiritual knowledge is the greatest benefactor of mankind and as such we always find that those were the most powerful of men who helped man in his spiritual needs, because spirituality is the true basis of all our activities in life. A spiritually strong and sound man will be strong in every other respect, if he so wishes. Until there is spiritual strength in man even physical needs cannot be well satisfied.”⁶ As man lives in this material world he has material demands which cannot be ignored. But satisfaction of mere individual interest or base material demands of life makes a man more narrow and selfish. Instead including others’ well-being, directs him to think about his collective existence in the wider social life that inspires him to work for social interest and to think about the large and collective life, as the centre of his collective or social existence.

In Western culture there is a great faith in the greatness of man as expressed through his different socio-cultural activities in this material world. But there are unlimited creative possibilities in man, beyond this limited field. For this Vivekananda explains this creativity as the infinite potential or divinity in man.

In order to explain the infinite potential of man, Vivekananda points out: “Do you know how much energy, how many powers, how many forces are still lurking behind that frame of yours? What scientist has known all that is in man? Millions of years have passed since man first came here, and yet but one infinitesimal part of his powers has been manifested. Therefore, you must not say that you are weak. How do you know what possibilities lie behind that degradation on the surface? You know but little of that which is within you. For behind you is the ocean of infinite power and blessedness.”⁷

It is man’s spiritual self or the consciousness that supports his entire psychophysical constitution. With the development of spiritual consciousness, that is to say, with the growing awareness of the true nature of the self, an individual’s moral and rational natures are bound to develop. And it is his moral and rational nature that makes his cultural growth, his social relations, and his material well-being sound and secure. The exemplary lives lived by spiritual personages serve as beacon light for the men of the world. Their wisdom, their moral integrity, their lofty thoughts, and noble deeds influence the masses. That is why in the wake of religious revival in a country there have been social, political, cultural, and material advancement as well, creating epochs in the history of human civilization. It was so in the past and it is so in the present.

The knowledge of this divinity is the secret of man’s development both in individual and collective life, secular as well as spiritual. It finds expression in two distinct ways: “I am divine” and “thou art divine.” As a man becomes aware of his own divinity and at the same time he becomes aware of the divinity of his fellow



beings also. Along with the development of his faith in himself his regard for others also develops to a great extent. His potentialities grow as his self-faith is intensified. His capacity for serving his fellow creatures proportionally increases. Says Swami Vivekananda:

“This infinite power of the spirit, brought to bear upon matter evolves material development, made to act upon thought evolves intellectuality, and made to act upon itself makes of man a God. ... Manifest the divinity within you, and everything will be harmoniously arranged around it.”⁸

In Vedantic culture this cardinal teaching of man’s divinity has so far been imparted by adepts to worthy pupils exclusively for their spiritual development. But Swami Vivekananda opines that this greater truth should be given to one and all. What led Swami Vivekananda to popularise the Vedantic truth was his unbounded natural compassion for one and all down to the lowest. His intense eagerness for the upliftment of man is evident from these impassioned words:

“Aye, let every man and woman and child, without respect of caste or birth, weakness or strength, hear and learn that behind the strong and the weak, behind the high and the low, behind everyone, there is that Infinite Soul, ensuring the infinite possibility and the infinite capacity of all to become great and good. Let us proclaim to every soul – ‘Arise, awake and stop not till the goal is reached.’ ... Teach yourselves, teach everyone his real nature, call upon the sleeping soul and see how it awakes. Power will come, glory will come, goodness will come, purity will come, and everything that is excellent will come when this sleeping soul is aroused to self-conscious activity.”⁹

Swami Vivekananda was primarily a lover of man. His heart felt for the poor, the ignorant, and the downtrodden everywhere. If he felt particularly for the suffering of millions of India it was because he had witnessed their condition and he knew that the spiritual regeneration of the world depended on the regeneration of India. He was convinced that nothing but the supreme spiritual truths, which India had preserved from time immemorial, which had been verified by the mystical experiences of her sages and saints and interpreted in terms of reason by her seer-philosophers throughout the ages, could save the modern world from growing secularism, which threatened her civilisation, nay, her very existence.

Swami Vivekananda says, “... I may 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 souls-and above all, my God the wicked, my guard the miserable, my guard the pool of all races, of all species, is the special object of my worship.”¹⁰

Sister Nivedita testifies to Swami Vivekananda’s love for man:

“No institution, no environment, stood between him and any human heart. His confidence



in that Divine-within-Man of which he talked, was as Perfect, and his appeal as direct, when he talked with the imperialist aristocrat or the American millionaire, as with the exploited and oppressed. But the outflow of his love and courtesy were always for the simple.

Only the realisation of spiritual oneness with all can develop such universal love. It is bliss and freedom at the same time. Says Swami Vivekananda from his own experience,:

“We have always heard it preached, ‘Love one another.’ What for? That doctrine was preached, but the explanation is here. Why should I love everyone? Because they and I are one. Why should I love mine brother? Because he and I are one. There is this oneness, this solidarity of the whole universe. From the lowest worm that crawls under our feet to the highest beings that ever lived all have various bodies, but are the one Soul. Through all mouths you eat; through all hands you work; through all eyes you see. You enjoyed health in millions of bodies, you are suffering from disease in millions of bodies. When this idea comes and we realise it, see it, feel it, then will misery cease, and fear with it. How can I die? There is nothing beyond me. Fear ceases, and then alone come perfect happiness and perfect love. That universal sympathy, universal love, universal bliss, that never changes, raises man above everything.”¹¹

The spiritual oneness of mankind is also the foundation of ethics. As stated by Swami Vivekananda:

“The infinite oneness of the Soul is the eternal sanction of all morality, that you and i.e. are not only brothers-every literature voicing man’s struggle towards freedom has preached that for you-but that you and I are really one. This is the dictate of Indian philosophy. This oneness is the rational of all ethics and spirituality.”¹²

Swami Vivekananda introduced a universal form of worship. Since God dwells in man as the inmost Self, He can be directly worshipped by serving man. All social work as well as the teaching of religion should be carried on in the spirit of worshipping God in man. In this way humanitarian deed turns into spiritual practice. The aspirants’ inner development and the amelioration of the world condition can go together. With this end in view Swami Vivekananda established the Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission- religious and philanthropic institutions the twin that have developed into a worldwide organisation-the monastic and the lay members of which strive to render service to the ignorant, the needy, the distressed and the diseased as the veritable worship of God dwelling in them. In this regard Swami Vivekananda was deeply influenced by Sri Ramakrishna’s unique statement, “If God can be worshipped through a clay image, then why not through a man?”

The influence of Sri Ramakrishna’s words is clearly reflected when Swami Vivekananda exhorted: “Look upon every man, woman, and every one as God. You



cannot help anyone, you can only serve: serve the children of the Lord, serve the Lord Himself, if you have the privilege. If the Lord grants that you can help any one of his children, blessed you are; do not think too much of yourselves. Blessed you are that that privilege was given to you when others had it not. Do it only as a worship. I should see God in the poor, and it is for my salvation that I go and worship them. 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! Bold are my words; and let me repeat that it is the greatest privilege in our life that we are allowed to serve the Lord in all these shapes. Give up the idea that by ruling over others you can do any good to them.”¹³

On another occasion Swami Vivekananda said, “You may invent an image through which to worship God, but a better image already exists, the living man. You may build a temple in which to worship God, and that may be good, but a better one, a much higher one, already exists, the human body.”¹⁴

Swami Vivekananda thus stresses the importance of man above all. Man’s inner nature is much more important than outer resources. It is man that makes money but not the other way. It is man that makes laws; laws do not make man. The solution of world problems rest basically on the individual’s model and spiritual lives. If these are lacking nothing can save the human situation; no political or economic system, no social order, no world- organisation, no advancement of scientific knowledge and technology, no development of arts, no rapidity of transportation and communication, no high standard of living, no difference measures, no subtle ideologies, no metaphysical concepts can establish peace and security in the world. Even education without a noble outlook on life cannot help us in this respect. Whoever has the well-being of man in his heart will carefully weigh the following remarks of Swami Vivekananda:

- “It is a change of the soul itself for the better that alone will cure the evils of life. No amount of force, or government, or legislative cruelty will change the conditions of a race, but it is spiritual culture and ethical culture alone that can change wrong racial tendencies for the better.”¹⁵
- “But the basis of all systems, social or political,” said the Swami with great earnestness, “rests upon the goodness of men. No nation is great or good because Parliament enacts this or that, but because its men are great and good. ... Religion goes to the root of the matter. If it is right, all is right.”¹⁶
- “Great indeed are the manifestations of muscular power, and marvellous the manifestations of intellect expressing themselves through machines by the appliances of science; yet none of these is more potent than the influence which spirit exerts upon the world.”¹⁷
- “I direct my attention to the individual, to make him strong, to teach him that he himself is divine, and I call upon men to make themselves conscious of this



divinity within. That is really the ideal-conscious or unconscious-of every religion.”¹⁸

· “It is a man-making religion that we want. It is man-making theories that we want. It is man-making education all round that we want. And here is the test of truth—anything that makes you weak physically, intellectually, and spiritually, reject as poison; there is no life in it, it cannot be true. Truth is strengthening. Truth is purity, truth is all-knowledge; truth must be strengthening, must be enlightening, must be invigorating.”¹⁹

Swami Vivekananda was an apostle of strength. His words infuse strength into the reader immediately. He encouraged the cultivation of strength above all. If he was intolerant of anything, it was weakness. According to him all virtues can be summed up in one word “strength,” all vices in one word “weakness.” The secret of man’s strength lies in faith in himself. It counteracts fear, which is paralysing. What can give man greater faith than the consciousness of his own divine nature? It is the religion of strength that Swami Vivekananda taught. He firmly believes that, ‘strength is religion and weakness is irreligion.’ Speaking about strength Swami Vivekananda said:

- “What makes a man stand up and work? Strength. Strength is goodness, weakness is sin. If there is one word that you find coming out like a bomb from the Upanishads, bursting like a bomb-shell upon masses of ignorance, it is the word fearlessness. And the only religion that ought to be taught is the religion of *fearlessness*. Either in this world or in the world of religion, it is true that fear is the sure cause of degradation and sin. It is fear that brings misery, fear that brings death, fear that breeds evil. And what causes fear? Ignorance of our own nature. Each of us is heir-apparent to the Emperor of emperors; we are of the substance of God Himself. Nay, according to the Advaita, we are God Himself though we have forgotten our own nature in thinking of ourselves as little men. We have fallen from that nature and thus made differences—I am a little better than you, or you than I, and so on. This idea of oneness is the great lesson India has to give, and mark you, when this is understood, it changes the whole aspect of things...”²⁰
- “Do you know how much energy, how many powers, how many forces are still lurking behind that frame of yours? What scientist has known all that is in man? Millions of years have passed since man first came here, and yet but one infinitesimal part of his powers has been manifested. Therefore, you must not say that you are weak. How do you know what possibilities lie behind that degradation on the surface? You know but little of that which is within you. For behind you is the ocean of infinite power and blessedness.”²¹
- “Men are taught from childhood that they are weak and sinners. Teach them



that they are all glorious children of immortality, even those who are the weakest in manifestation. Let positive, strong, helpful thought enter into their brains from very childhood. Lay yourselves open to these thoughts, and not to weakening and paralysing ones. Say to your own minds, "I am He. I am He." Let it ring day and night in your minds like a song, and at the point of death declare, "I am He." That is the Truth; the infinite strength of the world is yours. Drive out the superstition that has covered your minds. Let us be brave. Know the Truth and practise the Truth. The goal may be distant, but awake, arise, and stop not till the goal is reached."²²

Swami Vivekananda had the capacity to appreciate greatness in any form. In judging races as well as individuals his principle was "each is great in its own place". "Each race has a peculiar mission to fulfil in the life of the world." A king or a farmer, a monk or a householder, each faces his own status. Each and everything has to be from its political position. He saw a person's strong points, degraded though he might be, and appraised him accordingly. He would not cut the ground under anybody's feet, loose though it might be, but leading to firmer ground from where he stood. "Do not destroy anyone's faith," says Sri Ramakrishna.

Findings

Vivekananda's method as a reformer was to fulfill and not to destroy. The life and message of Swami Vivekananda point to the fact that there can be unity among men on the widest scale despite all differences. The world unity which is the crying need of the age has to be achieved not by exclusion or uniformity by unison, by following the principle of unity in variety. The one and the same-Ideal Reality- Pure Being Consciousness-Bliss-holds all multiplicity; the same Divine Being who controls the universe dwells in the hearts of all individuals as the inmost self. This central truth is the key to the explanation of all facts. To realise the Divinity is the supreme goal of human life. From any situation in life a person can proceed towards this goal following his own line of development according to his or her psycho-physical constitution. All human values-all that are necessary and desirable-art, literature, science, philosophy, ethics, politics, economics can contribute to the attainment of the highest good, the divine perfection.

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- ⁴ ibid, Vol 3, p 224
- ⁵ Ibid., Vol 6, p 12-3
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⁷ Ibid., vol 2, 301-2

⁸ Ibid., Vol 4, p 351

⁹ Ibid., Vol 3, p 193

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¹² Ibid., Vol 3, p 189.

¹³ Ibid., Vol 3, p 246.

¹⁴ Ibid., Vol 2, p 313.

¹⁵ Ibid., Vol 3, p 182

¹⁶ Ibid., Vol 5, p 192

¹⁷ Ibid., Vol 5, p 187-8.

¹⁸ Ibid., Vol 3, p 137.

¹⁹ Ibid., Vol 3, p 224-5.

²⁰ Ibid., Vol 3, p 160.

²¹ Ibid., Vol 2, p 301-2.

²² Ibid., Vol 2, p 87.