

Self-Management in the Philosophy of Vivekananda

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Abstract: The life in the present world emulating materialistic characteristics seems to be full of unhealthy competitions and struggle for success. Though succeeding in life is necessary but the affinity for success at any cost has left the life without any values and meaning and the failure seems to be leading to depression and related psychological issues. This shows that the success of life in its true sense is totally dependent on proper management and it should begin with one's own self - physical and otherwise. In the philosophy of India, the concept of self-management holds much significance from ancient times onwards. This aspect is usually explained in terms of self-realization, but the idea behind it, is of proper self-management. Later, with the advent of Neo- Vedanta, this aspect found new dimension and became exalted in high pedestal. The paper, 'Self-Management in the Philosophy of Vivekananda' discusses the concept of self-management expounded by Vivekananda, the chief exponent of Neo-Vedanta with respect to day-to-day life and the way in which it brings about success in life by the proper management of the self and the task at hand as well, and thus enunciating the secret of work brilliantly envisaged by the philosophy of the Vedas.

Index Terms – Vedanta, Neo Vedanta, Upanisads.

I. INTRODUCTION

The world seems to be moving at a fast pace than ever before, waiting for no one and the theory of 'struggle for existence and survival of the fittest' seems to be rampant in the society. This creates an urgent need for success in life or otherwise be defeated by the materialistic trends setting standards as a mark of success in life. This trend leads to a distinction between haves and have-nots, again distinguishing succeeding mentality emanating confidence and the unsuccessful ones are regarded as failures in the society. The reason behind this so – called 'success or failure' in life when analyzed seems to be totally dependent in the way in which one carries out, that is, the management of the work at hand or the attitude with which one handles one's own life, that is, self-management in its totality.

II. SELF- MANAGEMENT AS A SURE WAY TO SUCCESS

The concept of self-management was always of great importance in the realm of Indian thought. It was explained in the terms of realization of one's own self. This aspect became elucidated as self-management by Contemporary Indian thinkers such as Vivekananda. He propounds the ideas in the ancient texts of Vedanta, the philosophy of Upanisads and enunciates it in the form of Neo- Vedanta suited to the needs of the present day. He underlines the fact that the most successful of all the people ever known practiced these true principles of self-management and it is because of their success that India became known as the land of riches in the past - both spiritual and material and the then poor nations of the world came looking the material gains from India. It is through these connoisseurs, that the highest of all Vedantic philosophic thought found their way of realization. They were the ruling monarchs who indulged in deep and extensive thought, who knew the proper way of self-management.

Vivekananda explains that none of them were pessimists or escapists but the active participants of life working for the betterment of society. In his own words, "the people who discovered these truths were neither living in the caves nor forests, nor following the ordinary vocations of life, but men who, we have every reason to believe, led the busiest of lives, the men who had to command armies, to sit on thrones and to look to the welfare of millions- and all these in the days of absolute monarchy, and not as in these days when a king is to a great extent a mere figure head. Yet, they could find time to think out all these thoughts, to realize them, and to teach them to humanity." (Vivekananda,I, 296). He also adds that if such people who lead the real busy life could practice the principle of self-management and derive a successful life in the complete sense, it could be done by the so-called busy bodies of today. The way to it is to first know the secret of work.

III. SUCCESSFUL MANAGEMENT OF WORK

According to Vivekananda, the secret of success of behind any work is one has to give as much importance to the means one adopts in doing a work, as one gives to its final goal. He says that this principle of treating the means as well as the end of a work with equal significance is simply great and that he himself has learnt great lessons from it. He says, "it appears to me all the secret of success is there, to pay as much attention to the means as to the end."(Vivekananda,II,1)

Vivekananda conceives that the greatest disadvantage of man is that he is so much consumed by the result, the final end, of an action or work so much so that one actually forgets about the technicality of the means adopted in order to achieve the result. It is only when one fails to achieve the goal that one enquires how and where it went wrong and starts the dissection of the entire plan which was initiated to achieve the goal. Vivekananda says that in the majority of the cases it will be found that due attention was not given to the means adopted. Hence Vivekananda opines that enough attention should be taken in the beginning, middle and the end of the

means while making it strong in every part with proper execution and management and in completion as well. When the means becomes thus polished, progress in this right manner, the proper result will naturally follow the means.

IV. CAUSAL ASPECT IN SELF-MANAGEMENT

From the point of view of causation, Vivekananda explains that the people generally miss the fact that it is always the cause that creates the effect. The effect can never make it on its own. So, only if the cause is in the right shape and condition, and also powerful enough then, only the effect will be produced. Otherwise there will be no production of the effect. In terms of causation, he says that when the cause is present, there is no need to worry about the absence of the effect because the effect will naturally make itself known owing to the presence of the cause. So if the conditions necessary for the advent of the cause are fulfilled, it necessitates the production of the effect. Vivekananda said, "the realization of the ideal is the effect. The means are the cause; the attention to the means, therefore, is the great secret of life".(Vivekananda, II, 1)

V. PSYCHOLOGICAL ASPECT IN SELF-MANAGEMENT

Like a seasoned psychologist, Vivekananda explains the psychological aspects involved in self-management. He says that when one takes up an aim or ideal and finalized the method or means to achieve it then, one must not waste much energy or attention on the aim or ideal by fantasizing about it as it will not go anywhere but, all the concentration and energy must now be given to the path undertaken, that is, the means. It is the means that has to be perfected, and then only the end will come.

According to Vivekananda, one of the greatest drawbacks of human life is that when a man undertakes an ideal to achieve something, and even after the expenditure of lots of time, money and energy on it and still results in failure, the person is not able to let it go due to his attachment. Vivekananda says that, the greatest cause of sorrow is attachment (Vivekananda, II, 2). Vivekananda opines that even though one subconsciously knows that it is this attachment that is causing the misery and holding on to it will create even more suffering, but still one does not have the strength of capacity to let go. Vivekananda says, "The bee came to sip the honey, but its feet stuck to the honey-pot and it could not get away. Again and again, we are finding ourselves in that state. That is the whole secret of existence."(Idem)

VI. ASPECTS OF GITA IN SELF-MANAGEMENT

Vivekananda enunciates this idea of self-management in terms of Gita. There it is explained in the aspect of work. Accordingly, one has to learn to work and this work has to be done with whole of one's might in a continuous manner with enough regularity. The mind should be completely applied to the job undertaken with absolute concentration. Any job one takes should be done properly in this way. Even though the job takes up the complete concentration and attention in this manner, one should not get unnecessarily attached to it. It means that, though one has full concentration and is thus distracted by nothing while doing the job, but one still has the freedom and independence to give up the work at a moment's notice. That is, there is no futile attachment to the work, so one is at liberty to detach oneself from it at any time one wants.

Vivekananda says that this kind of acts happens repeatedly in every event of one's life. All the misery is because of one cause, the undue attachment that one gives into and the resulting entrapment. So it is explained in Gita to work constantly, but not with any sort of attachment, because it will result in the trouble of being getting caught. It says that one should reserve within oneself the power or capacity which enables one to get detached from anything at any time, even if one wants it badly. In spite of all the longing felt when about to leave it, one must still be able to overcome the feelings and go ahead with it. Still one should also have the ability to reserve this power of giving up everything whenever one wants under control. Vivekananda says that there is no room for weakness, that later becomes slavery. This weakness will further result in suffering, both mental and physical.

Vivekananda examines life and finds that people think it is attachment that creates happiness in life- attachment to friends, relatives or to intellectual or spiritual activities or even to things external. But one forgets the aspect that this kind of attachment brings nothing, but misery. He explains that in order to enjoy anything, one has to first remove oneself from it and stand apart as a witness then only one will be able to enjoy it. That is, one has to learn to get detached in order to become joyful. Only when one develops the power to detachment at will, there could be escape from all the miseries and troubles of life and become successful.

VII. ASPECTS OF STRENGTH IN SELF-MANAGEMENT

Vivekananda tries to explain the ways of self-management to strength. He considers weakness in man as the total annihilation, the complete death. Entertaining weakness of any kind is conceived as detrimental to the steps of gaining access to strength. He explains this using the following simile. In the atmosphere, in the air one breathes daily, there are many disease causing microbes present. But it does not affect us as long as one is healthy. When one becomes weak, then they cause harm because the body became in a preconceived state to accept the microbes. Similarly, he says that there are many elements that are surround man which may cause harm and misery. But these elements will have control or authority over the person until and unless the person lets it happen, that is, till the mind becomes weak. So Vivekananda claims that, it is the strength that gives the happiness, makes life into eternity and immortality. The weakness is constant struggle and suffering which makes life a living hell and so weakness is nothing but death.

The best of nature will be at the behest of whom able to be attached with all his might and yet, get detached as easily whenever he wants. This is hard to achieve as the amount of energy spent as attachment must be equal to that of detachment. Again, there is the case of people who are not able to understand any sorts of attraction to anything since they are hard-hearted and incapable of love. Their unsympathetic nature attributes to them, lack of miseries in life. Vivekananda says that this kind of life is no life and instead of being in such an inert state, it is rather good to be attached. He explains, "The man who never loves, who is hard and stony, escaping most of the miseries of life, escapes also its joys. We do not want that. That is weakness that is death." (Vivekananda,II,3) .He says that such a soul has never been awake as it does not feel the underlying weakness and permeating misery, and it must be avoided at all cost.

Even though the weakness of love through attachment is not appreciated, the strength of love and the strength through attachment which makes one totally focused on the object of concentration are conceived as highly desirable. It is said that the man of perfection can make his entire being focus on certain centre of love and also remain unattached. This is prescribed as another secret of work to be learnt. Vivekananda explains this with a simile of the life of a beggar who is never contented with whatever he gets and so cannot enjoy any of it, and in a similar way ordinary people maintain corresponding attitude. He says, "We are all beggars. Whatever we do we want a return," (Vivekananda,II,4). It is like that of a trade. People behave as if they are traders bearing a 'give and take' attitude. This conception of the trade- attitude, views Vivekananda, has a bearing throughout in life, say, in matters of virtue, religion and even in love.

Based on the attitude of trade if one proceeds in life, it is as if one enters the school of economics and commerce, there everything is dependent on the basic principle of business, whether it be for giving and taking or buying or selling. Like in the case of business enterprises which could be affected by inflation and deflation in the realm of market, causing positive or negative turns in business, one should always be prepared for the worst. "It is like looking at the mirror. Your face is reflected. You make a grimace- there is one in mirror; if you laugh, the mirror laughs. This is buying and selling, giving and taking." (Vivekananda,II,4).

VIII. LAWS OF SELF-MANAGEMENT IN NATURE

Vivekananda explains the way by which the Nature is governed and understanding the basic principles of the self-management in Nature advises that to go in harmony with it or it will ensure proper management of man. He warns against not getting caught in this web. He says that one does not get caught from anything that is given, but all the misery arises from the expectations of getting something back for that it is given. When a return is expected for what is given, it complicates the matter and creates suffering. It is this desire or want for getting compensated for what is given is the troubling ground as desires are based on 'the laws of success and failure'.

According to Vivekananda, the most successful man is the one who is the most unselfish in character, expecting nothing in return leads the true happy life and thus is successful one. The secret of success is conceived as not to ask for anything and expect anything in return. Vivekananda assures that, for whatever that is given could be expected back in greater proportions, but there is no need to give much focus on such matters as only one needs to give and stop the attention then and there itself. "Learn that the whole of life is giving, that nature will force you to give. So give willingly." (Vivekananda,II,5). It is because of the reluctance to give and not conceding to this principle of Nature, creates all the suffering of mankind. For instance, when deforestation is enacted due to the greed of man enunciating the 'taking' aspect, what is got in return is unbearable heat. The basic idea seen in Nature is that, when something is taken, it is also returned back in some other way, say, the heat of the sun vaporizing the water of the ocean is given back to the earth as torrential rain.

The mechanism entertained by Nature is such that whatever taken must be returned, so one only needs to give and Nature will take care of the rest. Then, there is not even any need to expect anything in return as everything will come back naturally to the right place provided the giving aspect is fulfilled. It is like sooner the air in the room is emptied, it will be filled by abundant fresh air, but if all the openings of the room remain closed instead, implying the aspect of not-giving, everything in the room will result in stagnation and degeneration leading to poison. As the river water runs to the sea, gets a constant supply of fresh water, but if its course running to the sea remains closed will stagnate it, in a similar fashion, the moment one closes the door marks the beginning of one's death.

So Vivekananda advises to be not attached, unlike a beggar. The task ahead may be difficult, just only to be a giver and not expecting any return but with due determination, careful progress should be made in this path in spite of all the troubles ahead. He cautions, "Nature wants us to react, to return blow for blow, cheating for cheating, lie for lie, to hit back with all our might. Then it requires a super human divine power not to hit back, to keep control, to be unattached." (Vivekananda,II,6).

IX. CONCLUSION

To Vivekananda, the way to ensure success in any mode of life is only through proper management of one's own self, that is, self-management. With a new resolution to remain unattached, one should begin the day casting away the things of the past which created all the trouble due to the unwanted attachment and unwanted love. But when external stimulus acts, the resolution may get forgotten and the past may repeat itself. Again, the resolution is renewed the very next day, but when time comes everything may be forgotten. Just like a bird trapped in a net trying its level best in vain for independence, human beings also struggles. Vivekananda understands the aspect that it is quite tough to overcome this basic nature, but adds that in spite of it with renewed energy one should try to accomplish it. For that ordinary man tremendous strength is needed. Though the path is treacherous, through constant practice it can

be trodden. One thing to be borne in mind is that, not a thing can affect anyone, unless one allows it, so constant vigilance has to be maintained. Vivekananda says, one should understand that, "I have no control over the external world, but that which is in me and nearer unto me, my own world is in my control." (Vivekananda,II,7). So that control should be constantly kept up and that is the fundamental idea of self-management.

From the very childhood everyone is taught to find fault in things external as the cause of the failures, but never once holds one's own self responsible for it. Vivekananda asks to give up such biased attitude and start taking responsibility for one's actions and adds that mostly it is the case. He says that if people claim themselves to be noble as Gods, without a taint of selfishness, how come they are affected by so-called 'fools' in the street. This shows that the very claim is bogus as the external world is felt as different from oneself, hence it creates the suffering. So Vivekananda asks to take care of oneself first, that is, manage one's own self. For that the means set to achieve the goal has to be perfected, and then the end will naturally come. The external world is only a reflection of one's own self. While the external world is the effect, the means is nothing but one's own self. Thus, through self-management absolute success in life is ensured in accordance to the philosophy of Vivekananda. That is, by perfecting the means, the end will be absolute perfection.

X. ACKNOWLEDGMENT

One has to acknowledge the fact that the illustrious teachings of the Upanisadic seers found expression in the teachings of Vivekananda in their true pristine form, without any adulteration, irrespective of the time and language of expression. So indebtedness to Vivekananda for revealing the ultimate truth of the philosophy of Vedas, in the form of the exposition of Upanisads, the concluding portion of Vedas, known as Vedanta, and enunciating it as Neo Vedanta in Contemporary Indian Philosophy, is beyond the realm of any words.

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