



VALUES AND VIVEKANANDA: A BRIEF ANALYSIS

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Abstract: It is a recent trend of the human being to be self-centred, though the whole world seems to be reached its optimum level of development through the huge technological progress. Earlier, people used to think for others and each member of a society used to get the opportunity to project their best ability for the society. Naturally, the pertinent issue is: whether self-centeredness makes and/or keeps a man really happy or not. In fact, human being has endless desire that is why he has failed to demark that particular way through which he can achieve happiness in its true sense. In the West, it is observed that every material comforts are available, but still they have been searching for peace. Swami Vivekananda being a great revolutionary thinker anticipated it, and understood that one of the most fundamental ways for achieving happiness in true sense lies in the value system of a nation. That is why, in 19th century, when he paid a visit to the European countries, he prescribed that India should give their Philosophy, Psychology and Spirituality to the West, so that the world could be lifted in a better position. It is the time, when the revelation of Swami Vivekananda should be revisited. By virtue of his thought and philosophy, we would be able to find out the pathway to get the peace. This article is a quest to find out the right path to get peace or to achieve happiness in its true sense following the way as stated by Swami Vivekananda with a special reference to the Mahabharata, Ramakrishna and *Bhāgavadgītā*.

Index Terms- Swami Vivekananda, value, human being, service, love, *dharma*.

It is a recent trend followed by the most of the human being to be self-centred, though the whole world seems to be reached its optimum level of development through the huge technological progress. Earlier, most of the people used to think for others and each member of a society used to get the opportunity to project their best ability for the public. Naturally, the pertinent issue is: whether self-centeredness makes and/or keeps a man really happy or not. In fact, human being has endless desire that is why; he has failed to demark that particular way through which he can achieve happiness in its true sense. In the West, it is observed that every material comforts are available, but still they have been searching for peace. Swami Vivekananda being a great revolutionary thinker anticipated it, and understood that one of the most fundamental ways for achieving happiness in true sense lies in the value system of a nation. That is why, in 19th century, when he paid a visit to the European countries, he prescribed that India should give their Philosophy, Psychology and Spirituality to the West, so that the world could be lifted in a better position. It is the time, when the revelation of Swami Vivekananda should be revisited. By virtue of his thought and philosophy, we would be able to find out the pathway to get the peace. This article is a quest to find out the right path to get peace or to achieve happiness in its true sense following the way as stated by Swami Vivekananda with a special reference to the Mahabharata, Ramakrishna and *Bhāgavadgītā*.

To set the tone of the paper, let us begin with a particular remark made by *Duryodhana* in *Mahabharata* while he was addressing Lord Krishna: जानामि धर्मं नचमे प्रवृत्तिर्जानाम्यधर्मं नचमे निवृत्तिः।केनापिदेवेनहृदिस्थितेनयतानियुक्तोऽस्मितथाकरोमि।¹ i.e. 'I know what is right but I am not inclined towards doing the right thing, I know what is wrong, but I cannot abstain from doing the wrong thing, Oh! Lord of the senses, you reside in my heart and I act as per the impulses of my heart'. He confessed despite of having the knowledge of good and bad, he was unable to apply it practically. In other words, acquiring knowledge does not guarantee the actual application. There is an insurmountable gap between these two. But the point is: whether there is any way through which this said gap could be bridged.

Sri Ramakrishna, the spiritual master of Swami Vivekananda, in order to bridge this gap, perhaps, often used to say that dharma means the exact correlation between what you are actually thinking and what you are doing ('*mon ar much ek korai holo dharma*'). There should not be any gap between these two. However, *Duryodhana* was not the only person who had faced such a crucial moral dilemma cum ethical issue in his life. In fact, almost all of us, whether directly or indirectly, have been facing such type of crucial moral dilemma cum ethical issue in life because of the huge gap between thinking and doing. *Duryodhana*'s unconditional confession to Lord Krishna about this prominent moral life issue indicates a sense of utter helplessness, one which we can often relate to.

In *Bhāgavadgītā* it has been found that a resonance of this moral dilemma through the binary concepts of *shreya* and *preya*. This has also been explained beautifully in *Katha Upanishad* where it has been said that whenever one is faced with a choice, one must decide for one self what is *sreya* and what *preya* is, and one must then act accordingly. *Preya* is what we like, what pleases us, what offers immediate gratification to our senses, feelings and self-will; without providing us with a lasting benefit in the long term. *Shreya* means choosing the best consequences, whether it feels good or not, often forgoing a temporary pleasure for the sake of a lasting benefit. These are known to us but we tend to forget them, and inclined by emotions we often act towards *preya* not *shreya* though we may be aware about *shreya*.

Following the discussion on *preya* and *shreya* as stated in *Katha Upanishad* and as well as in *Bhagavadgītā*, it is clear that *preya* is concerned with immediate temporal sensual pleasure whereas *shreya* indicates about the achievement of happiness in true sense. But the point is: why should one accept *shreya* instead of *preya*, because *preya* gives us immediate pleasure. The answer is: it is the dharma which helps us to make out that the *shreya* is the best, because it gives us permanent happiness though *preya* gives us instant enjoyment. One can follow the path of *shreya*, if he acts accordingly dharma and abides by the Vedic injunctions (*VidhiVakya*).

Now the point is; what is dharma? In the *shāstra-s*, dharma has been defined as: आहारनिद्राभयमैथुनचसामान्यमेतत्पशुभिर्नराणाम्।धर्मोहितेषामधिकोविशेषःधर्मेणहीनाःपशुभिःसमानाः² This means eating, sleeping, fear and sexual enjoyment are common for both the animal and the human beings, but it is the *dharma* which distinguishes human beings from other animals. In fact, the term *dharma* has many connotations. When *Duryodhana* used it in the aforementioned remark, he applied the term to indicate the justice. But when the same term dharma is used by the *vidhivakya-s* following the *shāstra-s*, it means the distinction between what is morally right and what is morally wrong that is good from bad per se. Let it be noted that in this sense of the concept dharma includes the concept of

¹ Vyasa, Pāndava Gitā, Mahabharata, Sloka 57

² Prasiddhavachana

morality, as we often tend to call morality as *dharma-niti*. A question may be raised — ‘How can human beings follow *dharma*?’

In order to find out the answer of the question mentioned above let us peep into the practical Vedanta of Swami Vivekananda. Being a Practical *Vedantist*, he at first resolved the confusion between the real world and its appearance as depicted in the *Advaita* Vedanta, following the *Samanvayi* Vedanta of Ramakrishna. According to *Advaita* Vedanta the world is *mithyā*. Naturally, one may ask the questions: (i) what is the utility of practicing the *dharma* in this particular world which is unreal or *mithya*? and (ii) how is it possible for one to be liberated by practicing *dharma* in such a world, which is not at all real i.e. *maya*? From this the next question follows: Is *dharma* insignificant for this world? According to *Advaita Vedāntins*, from the *Vyavahārika* point of view the world is real. In our daily life, we see that successful action or *saphalapravritti* is common in this world. So, the world cannot be considered as *alika visaya* or unreal object. On this ground, liberation within this world also cannot be considered something like *alika* or unreal. But from the perspective of *Pāramārthika* world or transcendental world, liberation within this world is unreal. Ramakrishna, on the other hand, was straight forward and he considered both the *Pāramārthika* world and the *Vyavahārika* world are real i.e. Brahman and its *Śakti* or *maya* are real. The Absolute is called as Brahman by him, from the eternal (*nitya*) perspective. When the Brahman is at rest is inactive. The same Brahman in its sportive (*lilā*) facet, when involved in the process of creation, preservation and destruction, He is called as *Śakti* or Kali, the same as *Ívara* or God. So, according to Ramakrishna Brahman and *Śakti* are one and inseparable. That is why he says,

The distinction between Brahman and *Śakti* is really a distinction without a difference. Brahman and *Śakti* are one (*abheda*), just as fire and its burning power are one. Brahman and *Śakti* are one, just as milk and the whiteness of milk are one. Brahman and *Śakti* are one, just as a gem and its brightness are one. You cannot conceive of the one without the other, or make a difference between them.³

Following Ramakrishna, *Swamiji* also said that a man could not become a man by birth; anyone could be a man if and only if he followed the *dharma*. That is why his clarion is: ‘Be and makes a man.’ *Swamiji* also draws our attention towards some ethical values like freedom, love, unselfishness, service and so forth. According to *Swamiji*, human beings, by nature, are free from any kind of bondage. From the perspective of soul human beings can never be brought under any bondage. It is the *avidya* which makes the human being to be bound. In *jñāna-yoga*, he says, ‘...ignorance is the great mother of all misery, and the fundamental ignorance is to think that the infinite weeps and cries, that he is finite. This is the basis of all ignorance that we, the immortal, the ever pure, the perfect spirit, think we are little minds, that we are little bodies.’⁴

Swamiji’s ideal of morality is based on love. It is the love towards humanity and is expressed through the service of humanity. For him, work is worship and service to man is service to God. He says, ‘He who sees Shiva in the poor, in the weak, and in the diseased, really worship Shiva...He who has served and helped one poor man seeing Shiva in him, without thinking of his caste, or creed, or race or anything, with him Shiva is more pleased than with the man who sees him only in temples’⁵. He also says, ‘love is the only thing that takes off all sorrows, that only cup by

³ Sayings of Sri Ramakrishna, P- 857

⁴ Vivekananda, Swami, *Jnana-Yoga*, P- 46

⁵ Vivekananda, Swami, *Complete Works*, Vol. III, (Kolkata, 1986), P- 142

drinking of which this disease of the world vanishes.’⁶ It is known to us that that the main aim of Indian philosophy is liberation. In *Swamiji*’s perception, liberation means realisation of humanity through the love i.e. through the service towards humanity.

The other main pillar of morality is unselfishness. *Swamiji* says ‘Self-abnegation is the centre of all morality...It means the abnegation of all selfishness.’⁷ According to him, the essence of *dharma* is unselfishness; here *dharma* is understood by him from moral perspective. In his words — ‘My idea is to show that the highest ideal of morality and unselfishness goes hand in hand with the highest metaphysical conception’⁸ Ramakrishna, however, used to say that ‘I knowledge’ is the main obstacle for the liberation of human being. It is really a tough task to think absolutely for others after giving up the ‘I knowledge.’ Ramakrishna, in this connection, again and again reminded, one could never attain the Brahman unless and until he was successful to give up the ‘I’ altogether which was a very difficult task. In order to explain how difficult it was, Ramakrishna used a simile. The bullock bellows, ‘*Hamba, hamba*’ i.e. ‘I, I’. After pooling the plough during the entire life in sunshine or rain, it is slaughtered by a butcher. But this is not the end. Shoes are made of its leather. ‘Last of all, strings are made from its intestines. When it falls into the hands of a carder and says, ‘*Tuhun, tuhun*’ (you, you), only then it is released.’ That is why Ramakrishna said, “‘I and mine’: this is ignorance. *Rasmani* built the Kali Temple – everybody says this. Nobody says that God built it. So-and-so founded the *Brahmo Samaj* – everybody says so. Nobody says that it came into being only by the will of God. ‘I am the doer’: this is ignorance.’⁹

Swamiji being a devotee for the welfare of entire human being including the innocent layman; adjoined one’s own liberation with welfare to the humanity. For him service to humanity means the service to the God and this is the easiest way to be liberated. In fact *Swamiji* explored a new dimension of liberation as his concept of liberation was social in character where human beings were in the centre the others including the God, religion etc. were in the periphery. According to *Swamiji*, liberation means the transcendent of self to others through the service of humanity. That is why he claimed:

Vahurupe sammukhe tomar chhari kotha khunjicha Iswar?

*Jive prem kare jei jan sei jan sevichhe Isvar.*¹⁰

Where are you searching God unmindful of his presence in front of you? Love for humanity is really service to divinity. He also added, our duty to others means helping others that is to do well for the world. To help the world implies the transcendent of self to others which is nothing but liberation i.e. to help ourselves. We should always try to help the world that should be the highest motive. Here one may think that by helping others he became very proud. He may think that he is more powerful in the society. In order to reject the ‘I-ness’ at the time of the service for humanity, he reminded us that being a human we were in fact very diminutive, it was the God who empowered us to help others. He remarked, ‘All this beautiful world is very good, because it gives us time and opportunity to help others.’¹⁰ He also added, “‘Yet we must do good; the desire to do good is the highest motive power we have, if we know all the time that it is a privilege to help others. Do not stand on a high pedestal and take

⁶ Ibid. Vol. II, P- 53

⁷ Ibid. Vol. II, P- 83

⁸ Ibid. Vol. II. P-353

⁹ Gupta Mahendranath: *Sri Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita Volume 1*, (A son of the Lord and Disciple), Calcutta, 1902, P-235

¹⁰ Vivekananda Swami: *Bani o Rachana Volume 6*, (Sokhar Proti), Kolkata, 1961, P- 210

five cents in your hand and say, 'Here, my poor man', but be grateful that the poor man is there, so that by making a gift to him you are able to help yourself. It is not the receiver that is blessed, but it is the giver. Be thankful that you are allowed to exercise your power of benevolence and mercy in the world, and thus become pure and perfect. All good acts tend to make us pure and perfect."¹¹

He asserted again and again that service for the betterment of others is actually the service for the sake of one's self as it tends to promote the liberation. *Swamiji's* vision about service is two dimensional—one is for one's own salvation and the other is point larger part of the world, but these two dimensional services are complementary to each other. In fact, it is the journey from self-centeredness to self-extension state. *Swamiji* also mentioned that service done out of inclination would never lead to the state of the self-extension from the state of self-centeredness. Though we have inclination, according to him, if anyone performs the action as worship of the God the inclination would slowly be removed and he or she will be progressed towards the salvation. He said, "The main effect of work done for others is to purify ourselves. By means of the constant effort to do good to others we are trying to forget ourselves; this forgetfulness of self is the one great lesson we have to learn in life."¹² He also said, "The highest ideal is eternal and entire self - abnegation, where there is no 'I', but all is 'Thou'; and whether he is conscious or unconscious of it, Karma-yoga leads man to that end."¹²

In fact, Swami Vivekananda was a spiritual leader: he did not develop any typical traditional Indian philosophy. His philosophical thoughts have been reflected in his various extempore lectures, letters, etc. *Swamiji's* philosophical thinking was based on three foundational principles through which he was successful to develop his practical Vedanta in the one hand and to show the way how one could be liberated through the service of man on the other hand. Let us peep into these three fundamental principles. These are as follows:

- a. Work is worship
- b. Service to Man is service to God
- c. One's own salvation is associated with the betterment of the world

As it has been mentioned earlier that *Swamiji* also uphold that the *maya* as a fact and the world 'exists'; here the term exists has been used in a special sense. According to *Swamiji*, this world can never be disappeared and the Brahman is all pervading. Human beings in this world are Godlike. In the *Upanishad* it is said that 'अहम्ब्रह्मास्मि' that is I am that Brahman which is real, conscious and blissful by nature. Everyone has infinite perfection. In fact, by nature, human beings are free from any type of bondage. But he, in general, forgets that he is Godlike. Individual liberation is possible i.e. the human being can manifest his Godlike nature following dharma. *Swamiji's* spiritual master Ramakrishna Paramahansa also used to say that the purpose of human life is to realise God. *Jiva* has the potentially to realise his own nature. He always tries to develop his work towards humanity. When we look after the Vivekananda's thought we may remember the aphorism of श्वेताश्वतरउपनिषद "सदाजनानांहृदयेसन्निविष्टः"¹³ It means supreme God resides in every human being. *Swamiji* preached this eternal truth by his own words of humanism.

¹¹ Vivekananda, Swami, Complete Works, Vol. I, P-76

¹² Ibid. Vol.1, P- 84-85

¹³ Tyagisananda, Swami, श्वेताश्वतरउपनिषद, Sri Ramakrishna Math, Madras, 1949, P-70, Sloka:3/13