

Paper → C-C

Indian Political Thought  
For Semester - III

Topic:- Swami Vivekananda:

Ideal Society

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Unit - (6)

Study Material given from  
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By V. P. Varma.

Material given and covered by  
Dr. Aniruddh Benerjee,

Department of Political Science

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SWAMI Vivekananda (1863-1902) was a comprehensive personality. Although of athletic muscular build, he had a mystic consciousness like Plotinus and Spinoza attuned with the absolute of the monistic idealists. But simultaneously he was a great intellectual at home in the secrets of metaphysical Vedantism, European philosophy and elements of modern science and had a burning enthusiasm for the alleviation of human suffering. The person who could perform the colossal feat of finishing the first eleven volumes of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (out of a total of twenty) had also a passionate urge to experience directly the ecstatic absorption with the subject-objectless (*asamprajnata*) beatific supernal state. The late Brajendra Nath Seal testifies to the deep and restless passion of Vivekananda to apprehend the highest truth from his early young days. Although the Swami was a revered teacher of the monistic Vedanta, still the devotional mood—characteristic of the great Vedantic Acharyas, like Madhva and Vallabha—was also prominent in his person. The world knows him as a gigantic mind who employed his stupendous will-power and energy to bring about a regeneration of India.<sup>1</sup> This monk, social energist and humanist philanthropist wanted, as he said, to fall on the society like an avalanche. He was a pilgrim of the city of God and a warrior for the cause of the suppressed. Hence the Swami's personality was almost unique in its comprehensiveness and deep sensitiveness to the evils prevalent in the socio-economic and moral structure of the country. (He preached both monistic asceticism and social service.) His intellectual vision was immensely clear and he could easily penetrate into the currents and cross-currents that were manifested in the history of India. Before his vigorous mind almost everything, from the Rigveda to Kalidasa and Kant and Spencer was clear and luminous.<sup>2</sup> He claimed to have realized the supra-

1 The intense nationalism and patriotism of Vivekananda is revealed in this declaration of his : "For the next fifty years. . . let all other vain Gods disappear for that time from our minds. This is the only God that is awake, our own race, everywhere His hands, everywhere His feet, everywhere His ears, He covers everything. All other Gods are sleeping. What vain Gods shall we go after and yet cannot worship the God that we see all around us, the *Virat*? . . . The first of all worships is the worship of the *Virat*—of these all around us. . . These are all our Gods,—men and animals, and the first Gods we have to worship are our own countrymen. . . ."—(*The Future of India*).

2 Dr. B. N. Seal (in an article in the *Prabuddha Bharat*, 1907) says that the early optimistic theism which Vivekananda had imbibed from the Brahmo

cosmic truth but still he worked with the strength of a lion. His soul gave one the impression not of the silent 'Purusha' of the Samkhya but of the active 'Atman' of the Vaishesika as also of the *Atman* of the Upanishads—the supreme energiser of the cosmic manifestation. It appeared as if the 'virya' and 'ojas' of the Mahabharatan heroes and the stalwart protagonists of Hindu imperialism in the days of the Mauryas and the Guptas was combined in his magnificent personality, with the spiritual 'tejas' characteristic of the ancient seers of the Vedas and Vedanta. Hence the Swami was able to achieve miracles in a short lifetime of only thirty-nine years.

The triumphant marches of Vivekananda, the 'Hindu Napoleon,'<sup>1</sup> in the American continent and Europe, demonstrated to the people that Hinduism had grown vigorous once more and was intent upon making a spiritual, moral and cultural-philosophical propaganda in the world. The New Imperialism of America and Europe met with this counter-attack from Asia. Asia had given to Europe the main elements of religion and culture in the past (e.g., Judaism, Christianity, Oriental influences on Roman religion, Islam in the Iberian Peninsula—also the influence of Vedantic thought on Thoreau and on the transcendental oversoul of Emerson) and Asia wanted once more to provide moral inspiration to Europe. (Vivekananda's powerful and eloquent orations on the stage of the World Parliament of Religions at Chicago in September, 1893, gave to our motherland a new self-confidence which is the true psychological precursor of an independent foreign policy.) The nefarious game of the Europeanization of this land of the sages received a great challenge. (Hence Vivekananda succeeded in imparting a dynamic and heroic-spiritual fervour to the formation of the culture-complex of India.)<sup>2</sup> The same vigour which Luther and Calvin had imparted to Western Europe seemed to be infused by Vivekananda and Dayananda in the passive calm of the contemporary Indian civilization. (There is no doubt that the influence of Vivekananda on some of the political teachers of Bengal like Aurobindo and Subhas Bose was deep.)

## II. Hinduism as a Universal Religion

(The Swami made a distinct and notable contribution to world religion in his championship of Hinduism as a universal gospel of ethical humanism and spiritual idealism.) Hinduism had been the subject of intense misrepresentation at the hands of Christian missionaries who suffered from 'imperialism-complex' and were actuated with a sense of burden to 'civilize' the black men and brown

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Samaj was shaken by his study of John Stuart Mill's *Three Essays on Religion*. He was also familiar with the sceptical philosophy of Hume. But more than the writings of philosophers, Shelley's "Hymn to the Spirit of Intellectual Beauty" moved him.—(*The Life of Swami Vivekananda*, Almora, Advaita Ashrama, 1933, pp. 92-93). Vivekananda had studied Kant and Schopenhauer, Mill and Spencer. He also probed into the writings of the ancient Aristotelian school. For sometime he had found intellectual consolation in the positivism of Comte.—(*Life of Swami Vivekananda*, Vol. I, "The Man in the Making", p. 87). But Vivekananda found final satisfaction neither in Platonic immutable ideas nor in Hegel's dialectical immanentism and universal Reason but in the Vedanta of the monistic school.

- 1 Due to his heroic mood and sometimes even domineering character, Vivekananda was called 'the Hindu Napoleon'. R. Rolland, *The Life of Vivekananda*, p. 19, says, "... within him there was a Napoleon."
- 2 Vivekananda once declared: "Expansion is life, contraction is death."—(*Works*, Vol. IV, p. 311).
- 3 The heroic action of leaders of modern Indian renaissance like Dayananda and Vivekananda reminds me of the personalities of St. Paul, Khalifa Omar

men by clearing the road for the economic exploitation of Asia and Africa (as can be seen from a study of the rise of modern new imperialism from 1870). But Hinduism was, to Vivekananda, a comprehensive gospel which could shelter within its bosom the profound philosophic intellect by its Nyaya, Samkhya and Vedanta, could offer to the psychologist its vast store of psychic wisdom of the *Rajayoga*, could inspire the devotee with the enchanted hymns of the *Samaveda* and the devotional songs of Tulsidas or of the Alvaras and Naynars (saints of the South), and finally could give to the puissant and hectic worker the doctrine of selfless action as enunciated in the celestial song of Sri Krishna. Hinduism did not mean to him the cluster of obscure cults and ritualistic superstitions, orthodox dogmas and primitive ceremonialism which, unfortunately, the European critic is very keen in observing, but it signified to him a body of moral and spiritual injunctions and primordial super-temporal laws for the uplift of humanity—एते जातिदेशकालसमयानवच्छिन्नाः सार्वभौमाः महाव्रतम्—(Yoga-Sutra, II, 26).

To him, Hinduism was the mother of religions and this can be, to some extent, demonstrated historically. The ancient Vedic religion influenced Buddhism, and the latter was possibly a potent factor in the rise of Christianity. The older Vedic religion also influenced the religion of Persia and Media and the reformist ethical movement which began in Judea in the 6th century B.C., was inspired by some aspects of the Western Asiatic religions (of Persia and India) which the Jews came to learn during the Babylonish Captivity. The researches that are being carried into the antique history of Egypt of Western Asia are demonstrating the cultural penetration of ancient Indian religion in far-off lands. In the Tell-el-Amarna letters (c. 1380-1350 B.C.) we come across Vedic names, e.g., 'Artamanya' which, according to Keith, certainly suggests 'Ritamanya'.—(A.B. Keith, *Indian Historical Quarterly*, 1936, p. 573). The 'Rita' is a vital concept of ancient Indian philosophy. The Mittanian gods (referred to in records of about 1400 B. C.) have a nomenclature which is definitely Vedic.

Vivekananda was a representative of entire Hinduism from the Vedas to Vaisnavism. He did not emphasize the Samhitas of the Veda to the same extent as did the late Swami Dayananda. He was impressed greatly by the '*Jnana-kanda*' (ज्ञानकाण्ड = वेदान्त) of the Upanishads. The universalism of Vivekananda reminded one of the catholic culture of Asoka. He had been brought up under the influence of his teacher Ramkrishna whose whole personality was a demonstration and vindication of the inherent spiritual truths in all the various religions. The Swami partly introduced once more the practice of proselytism in Hinduism which was falling into oblivion.

(He defined religion as the vital and moral force which gives strength to a person or to a nation.) In thundering words, he said, "Strength is life, weak-

- 1 In heroic words Vivekananda declared : "But this is not the time with us to weep, even in joy ; we have had weeping enough ; no more is this the time for us to become soft. This softness has been with us till we have become like masses of cotton. . . . What our country now wants are muscles of iron and nerves of steel, gigantic will, which nothing can resist, which . . . will accomplish their purpose in any fashion, even if it meant going down to the bottom of the ocean and meeting death face to face. This is what we want, and that can only be created, established and strengthened, by understanding and realizing the ideal of the Advaita, that ideal of the oneness of all. Faith, faith, faith in ourselves. . . . If you have faith in the three hundred and thirty millions of your mythological gods, and in all the gods which foreigners . . . have introduced into your midst, and still have no faith in yourselves, there is no salvation for you. Have faith in yourselves

identified with the motor nerves. If you take out the motor nerves, a man has no will whatever. This fact... has been found after a long series of experiments made with the lower animals."

—(Complete Works of Vivekananda, Vol. II, pp. 443-44).

Of course, in defence of Schopenhauer it can be pointed out that in the Upanishads we find many passages which indicate that the cosmos is the externalization of the will of the Absolute (ईक्षणम् of the ब्रह्म).<sup>2</sup>

Vivekananda was fundamentally a man of religion and philosophy. He was not a sociologist and hence he could not make any great contribution to the analytical and conceptual side of social sciences.<sup>3</sup> He wanted, however, to work out a radical reconstruction of society<sup>4</sup> but judged from the achievements he, personally, could not do much. Sometimes he wanted to offer a sociological interpretation of some aspects of Indian history<sup>5</sup> by calling attention to the protracted conflict between the Brahmans and the Kshatriyas. Although several radical social thinkers are greatly influenced by the Marxian gospel of class struggle and the dictatorship of the proletariat, the social order, based on a functional organization of the people, as crystallized in the 'four classes' of Hinduism, has found able defenders in Dayananda, Vivekananda, Aurobindo and Bhagawan Das, as one capable of harmonizing the spiritual-intellectual, protective, economic and social activities of men. Vivekananda did not give us a clear-cut social programme.<sup>6</sup> Nevertheless, he mercilessly condemned the iniquities of the caste system and untouchability. It is evident that if he would

1 Of course I may point out here that it is only a reference to the *Vijnanavau*. idealistic Buddhists and not to the other schools like the Vaibhasikas and the Sautrantikas.

2 सहायमीक्षां चक्रे—(Brihadaranyaka, I, 4, 2.)

3 In some of his extreme monkish moments he denounced any personal connexion with politics and once made the remark: "India is immortal," he said, "if she persists in her search for God. - But if she goes in for politics and social conflict, she will die."—(Miss MacLeod repeated these words to R. Rolland. *The Life of Vivekananda*, p. 169).

4 He is reported to have advocated intermarriage between castes and sub-castes for the promotion of social solidarity.—(Rolland, *The Life of Vivekananda*, p. 37).

5 Cp. Max Weber's *Essays in Sociology*.

6 Once Vivekananda declared that he was a 'socialist' and denounced the caste prejudices and malices of the Smritis and the Puranas.—B.N. Datta, *Swami Vivekananda, Patriot-Prophet*, pp. 369-70.

(Hence we find that many great men in India have been influenced by his personality and teachings.) Swami Ramatirtha, the apostle of neo-Vedantism who also lectured in Egypt, Japan and America, was deeply inspired by him. Subhas Chandra Bose recognized Vivekananda as his spiritual teacher. Aurobindo was a great admirer of him and read his works in his younger days. Swami Satyadeo owed allegiance to him. Radhakrishnan testifies that the enthusiasm and eloquence of Vivekananda in defence of Hinduism have deeply touched him.<sup>4</sup> Mahatma Gandhi went to see him in Belur Math, but could not meet him as the Swami was then ill. (Gandhiji was then an obscure man, about the year 1901). Jawaharlal has showered praises on the Swami in his book, *The Discovery of India*.

The profoundness of the personality of the Swami is unchallenged. The

Vivekananda's burning enthusiasm for the redemption of the oppressed is evident in these lines: "I do not care whether they are Hindus, or Mohammedans or Christians, but those that love the Lord will always command my service. Plunge into the fire, my children. . . Everything will come to you, if you only have faith. . . Let each one of us pray day and night for the down-trodden millions in India, who are held fast by poverty, priest-craft and tyranny—pray day and night for them. . . I am no metaphysician, no philosopher, nay, no saint. I am poor. I love the poor. . . Who feels in India for the two hundred millions of men and women sunken far even in poverty and ignorance? Where is the way out? . . . Who will bring the light to them? Let these people be your God. . . Him I call a Mahatma (great soul) whose heart bleeds for the poor. . . So long as the millions live in hunger and ignorance, I hold every man a traitor, who having been educated at their expense, pays not the least heed to them! . . ."—*The Life of Swami Vivekananda*, Chapter LXXXIII. Letter to his Indian disciples about 1894-95).

2 In autumn 1895, he wrote to Abhayananda: "Individuality is my motto, I have no ambition beyond training individuals."—(Quoted in R. Rolland, *The Life of Vivekananda*, p. 790). He also once declared, "One single man contains within himself the whole universe."—*Ibid.*)

3 *Complete Works of Vivekananda*, Vol. 2.

4 See his article in the book, *Religion in Transition*.

'Song of the Sannyasin' is the Bible of Bengal and the great legacy of this saint and mystic, Yogi and patriot. The Swami was a world preacher, but he was also the child of India. His noble patriotism compared favourably with the feelings of a Mazzini, a Bismarck, or an Abraham Lincoln. His dedication to the cause of Aryavarta was supreme.<sup>1</sup> The *Lectures from Colombo to Almora* is the Gita of the present-day meant to rouse millions of Tamasic Arjunas to hard work and puissant vigour.

## SECTION TWO

## THE POLITICAL THOUGHT OF VIVEKANANDA

## I. Introduction

(Vivekananda<sup>1</sup> was a spiritualist, a great creator and an inspired worker for the moral and social amelioration of India.) If Ram Mohan Roy, Keshav Chandra Sen, and Gokhale believed in England's Mission to India, Vivekananda, like Dayananda and Gandhi, believed in India's message to the West. In the course of his spiritual and philosophical development, Vivekananda jumped from innate faith to sceptical agnosticism and later is said to have attained the realization of the Absolute in *Nirvikalpa Samadhi* which is considered the state of super-consciousness. Modern post-Cartesian western thought is mainly occupied with the subtle questions of dialectical ontology and epistemology. In India also there flourished this type of thinkers and intellects—the *neonaiyayikas* being the greatest specimens. But in India *darshana* means vision of truth and in this country nobody was expected to assume the role of a philosopher unless he had an inner and intuitive realization of the truth of his teachings. The investigation into the realms of the phenomenal cosmos belongs to the province of science but the eye of the *darshanika* is searching for the hidden Reality. Swami Vivekananda was a philosopher in this sense of the word *darshanika*. It was his very deep sincerity which made him live according to the truths he had found out. Sometimes he was the serene monk spreading the pacifying and ennobling creed of the Vedanta. But he did not remain absorbed in philosophical and mystical realizations. In his temperament one does notice a deep aspiration for the Absolute, but there is also a burning zeal for the redemption of sin, sorrow and suffering. (As a great patriot he felt remorse for the decline of the country and hence he wanted at times to act as the iconoclast coming like a bombshell on the evils of society. (He pleaded for the liberalization of the rigidity of caste rules. Throughout his life he had the thinking attitude of a stoic philosopher but he never gave up his crusade for the betterment of the conditions of the fallen, the sinner, the suppressed and the poverty-stricken.)

(Vivekananda was a metaphysician of the Vedantic school. He was one of the great interpreters of the Vedantic philosophy in modern times. He was the first great Hindu of modern times who made persistent efforts to realize the

1 Romain Rolland, *The Life of Vivekananda*, Almora, 1953, 4th impression, p.7, says: "From his ashes, like those of the Phoenix of old, has sprung anew the conscience of India—the magic bird—faith in her unity and in the Great Message, brooded over from Vedic times by the dreaming spirit of his ancient race—the message for which it must render account to the rest of mankind."

2 Vivekananda, whose earlier name was Narendranath Datta, was born on January 9, 1863, and died on July 4, 1902. In September, 1893, he jumped into world fame by his eloquence in the defence of Hinduism at the Chicago Parliament of Religions. He twice visited the west; the first time he lived there from July, 1893 to April, 1897, but the second was a short visit from July, 1899 to December, 1900. He attended the Congress of Religions at Paris in 1900 and was a distinguished participant in some of its deliberations.

dream of the universal propaganda of Hindu religion and philosophy. (He was never a political philosopher in the sense in which we regard Hobbes, Rousseau, Green or Bosanquet as system-builders in the field of political thought.) He does not enter into the analytical study of the concepts of political philosophy, nor does he probe into the dynamics of political processes and behaviour. But he has a place in the history of modern Indian political thought for two reasons. First, the teachings and the personality of Vivekananda had a great influence on the nationalist movement in Bengal. (He was a great patriot with a burning love for the motherland. He had a vision of the unity of the country. His heroic soul always yearned for freedom.) Although primarily he taught the concept of spiritual freedom, this gospel was bound to result in the popularization of the other aspects of freedom including the political as well. Some of the terrorists and nationalists of Bengal learnt the value and sanctity of freedom from his famous poem "Song of the Sannyasin." In this poem Vivekananda eloquently pours forth his sentiments in eulogy of freedom :

"Strike off thy fetters ! Bonds that bind thee down,  
Of shining gold, or darker, baser ore,  
Love, hate—good, bad,—and all the dual throng.  
Know, slave is slave, caressed or whipped, not free ;  
For fetters though of gold, are not less strong to bind :  
Then, off with them, Sannyasin body ! Say—

'Om Tat Sat, Om' !

× × × × ×  
Where seekest thou ? That freedom, friend, this world  
Nor that, can give. In books and temples vain  
Thy search. Thine only is the hand that holds  
The rope that drags thee on. Then cease lament,  
Let go thy hold, Sannyasin bold ! Say—

'Om Tat Sat, Om' !"

(ii) He had eloquently preached the practice of Karmayoga and this gospel also underwent the process of a political metamorphosis and the succeeding generations interpreted selfless social and political service for the motherland as an example of Karmayoga. Vivekananda did not openly challenge the moral foundations of British imperialism but his very being and personality busy with the reassertion of things Indian was, indirectly, the explicit symbol of the neutralization of the foreign yoke. Secondly, Vivekananda has given us some ideas regarding the evolution of Indian society. He also gave forth eloquently his views regarding the solution of some of the pressing problems of the day. Hence his ideas have to be studied and discussed for getting a systematic picture of the evolution of social and political thought in modern India.

## II. The Philosophical Foundations of Vivekananda's Political Thought

(The sources of the philosophy of Vivekananda are threefold. First, the great Vedic and Vedantic tradition.) Sankaracharya, acknowledged as one of

\*1 Cf. M. N. Roy. *India in Transition*, p. 193 : "Vivekananda's nationalism was a spiritual imperialism. He called on Young India to believe in the 'spiritual mission of India. . . his philosophy, on which was subsequently built the orthodox nationalism of the declassed young intellectuals, organized into secret societies advocating violence and terrorism for the overthrow of British rule. . . This romantic vision of conquering the world by spiritual superiority electrified the young intellectuals, whose desperate economic position made them restive."

2 *Complete Works*, Vol. IV, pp. 327-30.

3 V. P. Varma, "The Relations of Tilak and Vivekananda", *The Vedanta Kesari*, November 1958.

the greatest of the metaphysicians of the world, and also Ramanuja and Madhva, Vallabha and Nimbarka have drawn inspiration for their thought from these works. Vivekananda was a titanic intellect. He is said to have gone through the eleven volumes of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. He had a deep understanding, not only of the literature of our land but also of western metaphysical thought from Plato to Spencer. He also had some knowledge of western scientific achievements. Vivekananda was an apostle of the Advaita Vedanta and he belongs to the tradition of the commentators on the Advaita system. But, although an Advaitist and a Mayavadi, his reconciling mind adds peculiarities to his interpretations, and his Vedantic writings are never a mere English or modern edition of Samkara's system. He had original powers of perception of his own which are apparent in his writings. Secondly, a powerful source of Vivekananda's philosophy was his contact with Ramakrishna (1836-1886)—one of the greatest saints and mystic of modern India. Mysticism has sometimes given aid to philosophy. In the case of Pythagoras and Plato we know that the philosophy of these two thinkers was partly inspired by the teachings of the Greek mystery sects. Shri Ramakrishna's mystic realizations were obtained almost in the same way as Buddha's—by intense self-castigations and mortifications and by spending a number of restless days and nights in search of truth. While Ramakrishna had preached his sermons in a style of prophetic simplicity and clarity, Vivekananda was the philosopher combined with the religious teacher. Hence he preached some of these same truths in a more philosophical language and used modern logical terminology. Thirdly, a rich source of Vivekananda's philosophy was his own experience of life. He traversed the wide world and to the interpretation of his experiences thus gained he brought a virile and keen intellect. Thus some of the truths that he preached were acquired by reflections on his own experiences. Hence his philosophy has its roots in life. It is not merely essentialistic and conceptualistic but has an existential character. The great defect of modern European and American philosophy is that it has lost contact with life. It is getting lost in the thick jungles of linguistic analysis, hazy logical symbolism losing touch with life is useless and barren. But the philosophy of Vivekananda is life-giving and dynamic.

For getting an account of Vivekananda's philosophy one has to turn to his complete works. The strictly philosophical portions of his writings are : (i) the *Jnana-Yoga*, (ii) his commentary on the aphorisms of Patanjali, and (iii) the various lectures on the Vedanta philosophy delivered in India or in the west. His political philosophy is contained in his *Lectures from Colombo to Almora, The East and the West*, and *Modern India*.

The central concept of Vivekananda's system is the *Brahman*—the highest reality, or the *Sachchidananda*—purest existence, knowledge and bliss. These three, *Sat*, *Chit* and *Ananda*, are not the attributes (*gunas*) of the supreme real but are the very being of the Absolute. These are not three entities but are really three in one. The Brahman is the highest reality and the highest truth and is revealed in mystical realizations. The Vedantic Brahman accepted by Vivekananda is neither the concrete Absolute of Hegel nor the *Sunya* of the Madhyamikas nor the *Alayavijnana* of the Yogacaras. It resembles to some extent the *Tathata* of Asvaghosa, but the difference is that the latter (Asvaghosa) is not very emphatic on the mystical perception of *Tathata*.

Swami Vivekananda accepts the philosophy of Maya. He, thus, regards time, space and causation as relevant only to the phenomenal world. He has attempted an inspired and rhetorical defence of *mayavada* in his *Jnana-Yoga*.

1 *The Life of Swami Vivekananda* by his Eastern and Western Disciples (Advaita Ashram, Almora, 2 Volumes), Vol. II, p. 193.

Bengali characters. Hence he concluded that in medieval times there must have been close communication between China and Bengal.<sup>1</sup> He also traced the similarity between the Vedic and the Roman Catholic ritual<sup>2</sup> and held that the latter had been derived from the former through Buddhism, which he considered a branch of Hinduism.

He believed in the historicity of Jesus Christ. But he interpreted the concrete person of Jesus as a divine incarnation. He accepted the possibility of a fusion of Indian and Egyptian religious elements in Alexandria which, in its turn, influenced the development of Christianity.<sup>3</sup>

According to Vivekananda, Vedanta had been not merely a philosophy for ascetics and contemplative philosophers but a great factor in the advance of civilization. He accepted that Indian thought influenced Pythagoras, Socrates, Plato and Neo-Platonists like Prophyry, Iamblichus, etc. In the Middle Ages, Indian thought entered Spain. He accepted Moorish influence on Spain and recognized the impact of the science of the Arabs on the formation of European culture.<sup>4</sup> In the modern world, Indian thought had been influencing western Europe, especially Germany.<sup>5</sup>

In ancient Indian history, Vivekananda felt, there was a dialectical tussle between the Brahmans and the Kshatriyas. The Brahmans had been the protagonists of a classical and intensive cultural outlook. They claimed to be the custodians of a traditional and customary culture. They, thus, represented conservative historicism and were the spokesmen of customs, traditions, conventions and institutionalized patterns of behaviour. The Kshatriyas, on the other hand, stood for a radical liberalism. They represented "the rising, fetter-destroying impulses of the nation" and were "defiant, impulsive" in their outlook.<sup>6</sup> Rama and Krishna also belonged to the Kshatriya aristocracy. Buddha was the champion of a Kshatriya reaction. Kumarila, Samkara and Ramanuja, on the other hand, tried to re-establish priestly power but failed.<sup>7</sup> I think that it may be partly possible to explain the dialectics of Indian historical changes and transformations in terms of social antagonisms and struggles between the Kshatriyas and the Brahmans. But this sole factor by itself is too inadequate to unravel the mysteries of the whole of ancient Indian history. Modern social sciences have made us aware of the concept of multi-factorial dynamics, and for a proper comprehension of Indian history we have to take account of other operative political, economic and religious factors.

Like Hegel, Vivekananda believed in the mission of the nation.<sup>8</sup> He felt that with its spiritual foundations, India's culture had a mission for the west.<sup>9</sup> The west was too much preoccupied with material, vital and commercial satisfactions. He, hence, pleaded for the incorporation of the deep religious values, which had been championed by the sages of the east, into western culture. He had prophesied that Indian thought would eventually conquer England.<sup>10</sup>

1 *Ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 352.

2 *Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 710.

3 *Ibid.*, p. 547.

4 *Ibid.*, p. 838.

5 *Ibid.*, p. 651.

6 *Ibid.*, p. 687.

Vivekananda stated that the genius of India had expressed itself primarily and dominantly in religion and philosophy. The realization of the deep eternal truths enunciated in religious scriptures had been the primary aim of the leaders of Indian culture. In his more enthusiastic moments Vivekananda said that the Vedantic spiritualism was needed to save western humanity from the morass of materialism. But as a widely travelled man of great experience he was awake to the significance of science.<sup>1</sup> He pleaded, therefore, for a unity between the Indian ideal of contemplation and the western ideal of mastering external nature.<sup>2</sup>

Vivekananda traced four periods in the religious history of Kashmir: (i) Fire and Snake-worship, (ii) Buddhism—sculpture being its most characteristic art, (iii) Hinduism in the form of Sun-worship, and (iv) Mohammedanism.<sup>3</sup>

#### IV. The Social Philosophy of Vivekananda

Vivekananda was inspired by the ideal of social harmony and synthesis embodied in the theory of *varna* system of ancient India.<sup>4</sup> He, hence, earnestly wanted that the caste system should be ennobled. The basic point is not to impose a system of dull uniformity on society but to help everybody in attaining the status of a true Brahman.<sup>5</sup> He, however, denounced priestcraft in vigorous terms because it perpetrated social tyranny and disregarded masses.<sup>6</sup> Thus, although an outspoken missionary of India's cultural greatness, Vivekananda was an iconoclastic crusader against prevailing social conservatism.

He condemned the old orthodox Brahmanical doctrine of *adhikaravada*.<sup>7</sup> This doctrine propounds the exclusion of the Shudras or the masses from the benefit of the Vedic knowledge. Samkara also adhered to this undemocratic dogma. But Vivekananda heroically championed the concept of spiritual equality. He stated that all men are equal and equally entitled to spiritual wisdom and gnosis of the highest type. (His democratic spiritualism was indeed a radical step.) Even the Upanishads sanction some kind of *adhikaravada* which is a plea for spiritual aristocracy. But Vivekananda wanted that the highest truth should be broadcast without any compromise. He said: "Thus you will confer the greatest blessing on the masses, unshackle their bondages and uplift the whole nation."<sup>8</sup>

Vivekananda denounced untouchability. He ridiculed the meaningless cult of the kitchen and the cooking-pot. He wanted, instead, the positive cultivation of the religious spirit of self-realization, self-abnegation and good of the community.

In the modern world there is a struggle between the upholders of the antagonistic rights of different groups and sections. Society, therefore, is gradually becoming the theatre of a war for the assertion of the contrary concepts

1 *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Vol. I, p. 294.

2 *Ibid.*, Vol. V, p. 157.

3 *The Life of Swami Vivekananda*, Vol. II, p. 170.

4 Vivekananda once interpreted the *Varna* sociology as a kind of social communism. He said: "In India, we have social communism, with the light of Advaita—that is, spiritual individualism—playing on and around it; in Europe, you are socially individualists, but your thought is dualistic, which is spiritual communism. Thus the one consists of social institutions, hedged in by individualistic thought while the other is made up of individualist institutions, within the hedge of communistic thought."

5 *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Vol. V, p. 144.

6 *The Life of Swami Vivekananda*, Vol. II, p. 353.

7 "The Evils of Adhikaravada", *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Vol. V, pp. 190-92.

8 *The Life of Swami Vivekananda*, Vol. II, p. 758.

Like Hegel, Vivekananda believed that there is one all-dominating principle manifesting itself in the life of each nation. Religion, for example, had been the momentous guiding principle in India's history. He said: "In each nation, as in music, there is a main note, a central theme, upon which all others turn. Each nation has a theme: everything else is secondary. India's theme is religion. Social reform and everything else are secondary." He, hence worked to build the foundations of a religious theory of nationalism which was later advocated by Bipin Chandra Pal and Aurobindo. Vivekananda was the passionate advocate of the religious theory of nationalism, because religion, he stated, had to be made the backbone of the national life. He felt that the future greatness of the nation could be built only on the foundations of its past greatness. To be unmindful of the past was tantamount to the negation of the very being of the nation. It meant almost the repudiation of its existence. Hence, Indian nationalism had to be built on the stable foundation of the past historical heritage. In the past, the creativity of India expressed itself mainly and dominantly in the sphere of religion. Religion in India had been a creative force of integration and stability and if and when the political authority had become loose and weak, it imparted even to that a force of rehabilitation. Hence, Vivekananda declared that the national life should be organized on the basis of the religious ideal. Spirituality or religion meant, according to him, the realization of the eternal principles and was never to be identified with social dogmas, ecclesiastical formulations and obsolete customs. Religion had been the persistent basis of Indian life and all reforms must come through religion to be able to obtain the adherence of the masses. Thus a spiritual or religious theory of nationalism may be regarded as the first contribution of Vivekananda to political theory. Vivekananda's soul, like that of Bankim, was lit with the luminous vision of Mother India as a deity and this conception of India as the visible expression of the divine mother has been the basic concept in the writings and utterances of the early Bengal nationalists and terrorists.

A second contribution of Vivekananda to political theory is his concept of freedom. He had a comprehensive theory of freedom. The whole universe, he said, in its constant motion represented the dominant quest for freedom. He regarded the light of liberty as the only condition of growth. He said:

"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

1 Swami Vivekananda, *On India and Her Problems*, pp. 102-03.

2 *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (Mayavati Memorial Edition), Part I, 1936, p. 140.

3 *Ibid.*, p. 554.

4 Vivekananda said that civilization was the expression of the inner divinity.

5 *The Life of Swami Vivekananda*, Vol. II, p. 698.

6 Vivekananda regarded the Vedanta as a rational explanation of the universe and a world-religion. He held that Vedanta had also useful social implications. It taught faith in oneself, oneness of all living being, and the divinity of man. It taught the secret of disinterested action. It could reconcile all religions and sects. Thus, Vedanta could serve the purpose of social and political reconstruction.

7 Vivekananda said in a London lecture: "What is this Universe? In freedom it rises, in freedom it rests."

8 Vivekananda: "Liberty is the sole condition of spiritual progress."

should be taken to destroy them speedily. Those institutions should be encouraged by which men advance in the path of freedom. . . ."<sup>1</sup>

He not only stood for spiritual freedom or emancipation from the bonds and demands of Maya, but also wanted the material or external freedom of man. He believed in the theory of natural right of man. He stated: "Liberty does not certainly mean the absence of obstacles in the path of misappropriation of wealth, etc., by you and me, but it is our *natural right* to be allowed to use our own body, intelligence or wealth according to our will, without doing any harm to others; and all the members of a society ought to have the same opportunity for obtaining wealth, education, or knowledge."<sup>2</sup> Freedom in its total aspects—physical freedom, mental freedom and spiritual freedom—had been the watchwords of the Upanishads, according to him. He also earnestly hoped that the freedom which dawned in America on the 4th July, 1776, would become universal in the world. In a poem entitled "To the Fourth of July" Vivekananda wrote in ringing words:

"All hail to thee, thou Lord of Light  
A welcome new to thee, today,  
O Sun! Today thou sheddest Liberty!

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Move on, O Lord, in thy resistless path  
Till thy high noon o'erspread thy world,  
Till every lane reflects the light,  
Till men and women, with uplifted head,  
Behold their shackles broken, and  
Know, in springing joy, their life renewed!"

A third contribution of Vivekananda is his concept of strength and fearlessness which, in terms of political philosophy, can be called theory of resistance.<sup>3</sup> Vivekananda was an ardent patriot and had tremendous love for the country. He was the embodiment of emotional patriotism. He had established almost a sense of identity-consciousness with the country, its peoples and its historic ideals. He did not, however, openly advocate the cause of India's political emancipation. He could not do so for two reasons. First, he was a sannyasin and did not want to get involved in political and legal controversies. As he wrote in September, 1894: "I am no politician or political agitator. . . I care only for the Spirit. . . So you must warn the Calcutta people that no political significance be ever attached falsely to any of my writings or sayings. . . I have said a few harsh words in honest criticism of Christian governments in general, but that does not mean that I care for, or have any connection with politics."<sup>4</sup> Secondly, in those days the British imperialistic power was firmly entrenched in India. If Vivekananda would have openly advocated the cause of political autonomy he was sure to meet with imprisonment. That would have meant loss of his energy and detraction from the work that was dearest to his heart—the moral and religious regeneration of his countrymen. (But although Vivekananda did not openly advocate any protestant theory of Indian nationalism in opposition to British imperialism) he was intensely devoted to the cause of the emancipation of the

1. *The Life of Swami Vivekananda*, Vol. II, p. 753.

## II. Vivekananda as a Socialist

Vivekananda was a social realist. The mature philosophical disquisitions on gnosis, contemplation and spiritual realization represented one dominant side of his personality. He certainly wanted the materialistic and dynamic West to imbibe the spiritual teachings of the Yoga and the Vedanta. He did want them to cultivate an introspective and subjective psychology. But his message to his

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1 *Ibid.*

2 While sanctioning the attack on "foolish superstition", Vivekananda was not in favour of preaching "any violent reforms at present". He wrote: "Try to revive society on the old grounds of universal salvation and equality as laid down by the old masters, such as Samkaracharya, Ramanuja and Chaitanya."—*The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Vol. IV, p. 314.

own countrymen was realistic and pragmatic. His experiences during his travels in India and the West revealed to him the imperative necessity of strength and fearlessness for straightening the backbone of a nation subjected to misery, frustration and political tragedies for over a thousand years. He was intensely conscious of the miseries of India's millions. It is indeed a revolutionary statement from the mouth of a *sannyasin* when he utters: "It is mockery to offer religion to a starving man." It is a revolutionary statement from the pen of a Vedantist that India is a "country where millions of people live on flowers of the *mohua* plant, and a million or so of Sadhus and a hundred million or so of Brahmins suck the blood out of these poor people." Thus, it is clear that this mighty champion of the superiority of the spiritual metaphysics of the Hindus was unyielding in his fervent and eloquent appeal for the "elevation of the masses" because "the nation lives in the cottage". (As a social revolutionary, Vivekananda denounced in unmeasured terms the evils of caste and held the Brahmin priesthood responsible for suppression of the lower classes by having created this *maya* of caste distinctions.)

(The deep social realism of Vivekananda is also revealed in his statement that India's political slavery of a thousand years is rooted in the suppression of the masses. The social tyrants and aristocratic despot of this country exploited the millions of masses. They held the latter in disgust and contempt and humiliated them so much that they almost lost their humanity.) With such degradation of the life-blood of the nation, India could not stand as a match for the foreign invader. The masses are the "backbone of the country", because they produce all wealth and food. When they are rejected and humiliated, how shall they contribute to the growth of national energy? For any rejuvenation of the country, it was extremely essential to take positive and constructive steps for raising the masses up. The millions and millions of Indian people were to be saved from the four evils of, (i) priestcraft, (ii) poverty, (iii) tyranny, and (iv) ignorance. This was a formidable problem and, necessarily, demanded great sacrifice on the part of educated Indians. Vivekananda, hence, declared: "I hold every man a traitor, who having been educated at their expense, pays not the least heed to them."

He mercilessly denounced the sophistication, the arrogance and the wickedness of the upper classes of Indian society. They have been responsible for exploiting the millions of masses throughout India's history. They, in the nineteenth century, began to co-operate with the British imperialism and helped in strengthening the foundations of a foreign political and economic system because that system, in its turn, permitted them to practise their own oppressions on their less fortunate brethren. Vivekananda poured forth all his suppressed venom and deep resentment against these so-called upper classes, these Anglo-Indian imitators of the ways of their masters and perpetrators of all sorts of tyranny on the poor defenceless masses in these memorable words:

"You, the upper classes of India, do you think you are alive? You are but mummies ten thousand years old. It is among those whom your ancestors despised as walking carrion that the little of vitality there is still in India is to be found; and it is you who are the real walking corpses. . . In this world of *Maya*, you are the real illusions, the mystery, the real mirage in the desert, you, the upper classes of India! You represent the past tense, with all its varieties of form jumbled into one. That one still seems to see you at the present time, is nothing but a nightmare brought on by indigestion. You are the void, the unsubstantial nonentities of the future. Denizens of the dreamland, why are you loitering any longer? Fleshless and bloodless skeletons of the dead body of Past India that you are, why do you not quickly reduce yourselves into dust and disappear in the

air? You merge yourselves in the void and disappear, and let New India arise in your place. Let her arise—out of the peasants' cottage, grasping the plough; out of the huts of the fisherman, the cobbler and the sweeper. Let her spring from the grocer's shop, from beside the oven of the fritter-seller. Let her emanate from the factory, from marts and from markets. Let her emerge from groves and forests, from hills and mountains. These common people have suffered oppression for thousands of years—suffered it without murmur, and as a result have got wonderful fortitude. They have suffered eternal misery, which has given them unflinching vitality. Living on a handful of grain, they can convulse the world; give them only half a piece of bread, and the whole world will not be big enough to contain their energy; they are endowed with the inexhaustible vitality of a Raktavija. And, besides, they have got the wonderful strength that comes of a pure and moral life, which is not to be found anywhere else in the world. Such peacefulness, such contentment, such love, such power of silent and incessant work, and such manifestation of lion's strength in time of action—where else will you find these! Skeletons of the past, there, before you, are your successors, the India that is to be. Throw those treasure-chests of yours and those jewelled rings among them, as soon as you can; and you vanish into the air, and be seen no more—only keep your ears open. No sooner will you disappear than you will hear the inaugural shout of Renaissance India.”

This passage convincingly reveals that Vivekananda earnestly and passionately felt that the renaissance India of the future would be based on the solid foundations of the “common people”, and on the cemeteries of the old aristocratic and feudal caste leaders a glorious historical heritage would be reared.)

Vivekananda was one of the first thinkers in India to offer a sociologically realistic interpretation of Indian history. Behind the cataclysmic turmoils of political perturbations he sought to find out the running strand of social conflicts.<sup>2</sup> His sociological interpretation of Indian history is also partly Marxist in character, but it is Marxist in his own way and there is no evidence to indicate that he had read *The Capital* or *The Communist Manifesto*. According to him, in ancient India, one finds the struggle between royal power and priestly power. Buddhism was a revolt of the Kshatriyas and it resulted in the decay of priestly power and the ascendancy of royal power. Later on, Kumarila, Samkara and Ramanuja attempt to bring about an ascendancy of priestly power. The Brahmanical priests also tried to obtain a lease of life by alliance with the new medieval Rajput feudalism. But the advance of the Mussalman power shattered all the hopes and designs of priestly ascendancy. Nor could the priests dream of the revival of their power under the foreign rule of the

1 *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Vol. VII, pp. 326-28.

2 Vivekananda dwells on the conflict of the ruling power and the common people in his ‘Modern India’, *Complete Works*, Vol. IV, pp. 394-95: “It is the evidence of history that at a certain time every society attains its manhood, when a strong conflict ensues between the ruling power and the common people. The life of the society, its expansion and civilization, depend on its victory or defeat in this conflict. Such changes revolutionizing society have been happening in India again and again, only in this country they have been effected in the name of religion, for religion is the life of India, religion is the language of this country, the symbol of all its movements. The Charvaka, the Jaina, the Buddha, Samkara, Ramanuja, Kabir, Nanak, Chaitanya, the Brahmo Samaj, the Arya Samaja—of all these and similar other sects, the wave of religion, foaming, thundering, surging, breaks in the front, while in the rear follows the filling-up of social wants.”

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Marx stressed the need of an organized proletarian party for effectuating the coming socialist revolution. Vivekananda wanted to train individual workers for the social amelioration of India. His humanistic ethics and positivistic interests of the Comtean type were revealed in the fact that he energized the solitary individualistic and meditative members of *sannyasa ashrama* into an active philanthropic society. The fundamental difference between the Vedantic Socialism of Vivekananda and Marxism is that although the former stressed the reformation of society, he put greater stress on the elevation of human consciousness into the divine. Marx was a great realist and a dialectical materialist and wanted even violent social revolution. But one point may be noted regarding the doctrines of Marx. They bear the character of a philosophy dominated by hate, contempt and envy. Marxism is not essentially a deeply philosophic doctrine in the sense Platonism, Vedantism, Buddhism or Hegelianism are philosophical systems. It was born as a reaction against the disturbing and maladjusted situation created by the Industrial Revolution. It wants to eliminate by violent technics the contradictions of bourgeois capitalism but makes no attempt to solve the deeper problems of man. The spiritually-rooted sociological doctrines of Vivekananda with their stress on the cultivation of purity and fraternity have been the restatement of the perennial philosophy of justice, love and universal compassion.