

SWAMI VIVEKANANDA : THE NOTION OF PRACTICAL VEDĀNTA

Vivekananda, the great Indian Monk of Vedantism was a man of spirit and action. He told us in a voice unique to him, "Each soul is potentially divine. The goal is to manifest this divinity within, by controlling nature external and internal. Do this either by work or worship, or psychic control or philosophy by one, or more, or all of these and be free."¹

Vivekananda was in and out an advaitist Vedāntist Sannyāsī. He says, "The Vedānta, then, practically forms the scriptures of the Hindus, and all systems of philosophy that are orthodox have to take it as their foundation. The Vedānta philosophy as it is generally called at the present day, really comprises all the various sects that now exist in India."²

Māyā was a well-known word. According to Vivekananda "The theory of Maya is as old as the Ṛk-Saṁhita. The Śvetāsvatara Upaniṣad contains the word, "Māyā which is developed out of Prakṛti."³ In discussing Vivekananda's conception of Māyā we must first realise the special characteristics this great personality bore. It might be expressed in Roman Rolland's version, "He himself was the embodied unity of nation containing a hundred different nations, where in each nation, divided and subdivided into castes and sub-castes, seems like one of those diseased persons whose blood is too liquid to congeal and his ideal was unity, both of thought and of action. His claim to greatness lies in the fact

that he not only proved its unity by reason, but stamped it upon the heart of India in flashes of illumination."⁴ In his second lecture delivered at London in 1896, Vivekananda discussed in detail the significance of māyā. It is Māyā, the concept which Vedānta Philosophy, accepts "as one of its basic pillars." Māyā was conceived, according to Vivekananda, pointed out the fact that this sense of delusion was rather manipulated and got a modified form in Śaṅkarāchārya's version. The meaning of Māyā as a delusive magical force in Vivekananda's opinion was substantially backed by the Buddhists. Idealist Buddhism accepted the notion of illusion and wanted to explain the outer world as mind's creation. "But (Vivekananda held) the Māyā of the Vedānta, in its last developed form, is neither Idealism nor Realism, nor is it a theory. It is a simple statement of facts what we are, and what we see around us."⁵ Māyā is used as a technical term in Advaita Vedānta which misrepresents the things which are not real to appear as real.

This world of everyday experience and the universe with all its mysteries set before the Vedāntic thinkers a great problem to be contemplated and solved. But "Every attempt to solve the laws of causation, time and space would be futile, because the very attempt would have to be made by taking for granted the existence of these three."⁶

The question remains, the same "what does the statement of the existence of the world mean then ?" In fact this world of experience is full of opposites. It is this co-existence of contradictory predicates like existence

and non-existence makes this world unique. Generally in Logic, the predicates like existence and non-existence exclude each other. They can never stay on the same par. But Vivekananda points out the fact that they in practical field exist - they exist in this world of experience. "Coming from abstractions to the common, everyday details of our lives, we find that our life is a contradiction, a mixture of existence and non-existence."⁷

Vivekananda emphasized on this practical experience of contradiction - which the general people realises in every aspect of life with a bit of hope and at the next moment a lot of despair. Vivekananda points out the fact that human beings have limited power and thereby should have limited expectation of ultimate or absolute attainment. On the otherhand life is not a total loss it is not at all a sheer vacuous existence. We strive for a goal, we feel satisfaction in our success. These all are positive experiences and can never be discarded away as all in vain. Thus we have some sort of reality, though not absolute. Though in this very māyā-made world we realise the apparent reality is something different from the ultimate truth. One's life oscillates between freedom and bondage, knowledge and ignorance, love and passion, reality and unreality. This is life - this is the fact and the realisation of this fact leads to the realisation of the theory of Māyā and thereby one of the basic tenets of Advāita Vedāntism.

In case of knowledge, men generally think that their power of acquiring knowledge is unlimited. They think they can solve whatever problem

they get, but fact asserts the contrary. In fact we are bound by intellect and generally fail to solve problems which amounts to a lot of number. Man dies but till death, earnestly clings to life. "They are all going to death, and yet this tremendous clinging on to life exists. Somehow, we do not know why we cling to life, we cannot give it up. And this is Māyā."⁸ Māyā involves the contradiction of knowledge and ignorance, life and death.

Our attachment sometimes leads to some objects, sometimes to men. Our latent desire or passion takes the disguise of greater feelings like love, sacrifice or struggle, though in fact there remains just a blind, helpless temptation. Man thus consciously or unconsciously not only misleads others but also himself that nothing but love a great emotional feeling is the evocative feeling here, lies behind all his endeavours or sacrifices. But it is man's self-created fog in which he loses all his way out. He knows within himself that it is something unreasonable still runs after it. He knows such craving will ruin him, still he erects false arguments and reasons to make unreasonable harmful as beneficent. This contradiction is the crude fact, none can avoid it "And this is Māyā."

Nobody can go beyond this contradiction. None can supersede it. Contradiction makes life practical "Māyā is a statement of the fact of this universe, of how it is going on. "Each and every contradictory predicate goes by hand in hand - nothing is ultimate. Life is in-between practice of oscillating opposites. No amount of effort can remove evil totally. We may dream of a state full of heavenly happiness but it can never

happen. Enhancement of good in one place, success in one field invariably brings evil or failure in some other place." As soon as this man progresses, as soon as his horizon of happiness increases, his horizon of unhappiness increases proportionately." We, human beings cannot change the situation. We cannot go beyond this conditional state of causation, space and time.

Now the question arises, why should it be so unavoidable state that we cannot resist this state of contradiction. We cannot even reasonably ask the question why or how such is the fact. Vivekananda says. "Why cannot be asked beyond the limit of causation. It can only be asked within Māyā. We say we will answer the question when it is logically formulated. Before that we have no right to answer."⁹

Now what is the cause of Māyā this question can never be asked, as because within the framework of time, space and causation we have in fact no logical ground to ask such a question. Vivekananda says, "Time, space and causation we call Māyā."¹⁰

He again says, the "why of anything is in Māyā. To ask why Māyā came is a useless question, because the answer can never be given in Māyā, and beyond Māyā who will ask it ? Evil creates, "why" not "why" the evil, and it is evil that asks "why". Illusion destroys illusion."

Whether Māyā is without beginning or end was a question in answer to which Vivekananda said "Māyā is eternal both ways taken universally

as genus, but is non-eternal individually, when one realises Brahman for him Māyā exists no longer, just as once the identity of the rope is found out, the illusion of the serpent comes no more."¹¹

In Sister Nivedita's language the theory of Māyā for Vivekananda was "always considered, for his own part, as his greatest intellectual achievement during this period had consisted in his lectures on Māyā, and it is only by reading these carefully that an idea can be formed of the difficulty of the task he undertook in trying to render the conception in modern English".¹² Vivekananda's description of Māyā as a simple statement of facts what we are and we see around us" is not at all a definition it was rather some sort of description of the universe as such. This description in other words refers to our everyday experience of troublesome, transient world which is full of contradictions like joy and sorrow, life and death, hope and despair,"¹³ highlighted on the practical way of life rather on the theoretical ecstasy of spinning arguments at large. "By Māyā is thus meant that shimmering, elusive half real, half unreal complexity, in which there is no rest, no satisfaction, no ultimate certainty, of which we become aware through the sense and through the mind as dependent on the senses."

Vivekananda makes reference to Kant's theory of form and categories in explaining Māyā. Kant upheld the view that there is a distinction between the real world i.e. noumenon and the apparent world i.e. the

phenomenon. We acquire knowledge through the form of experiences i.e. space, time and the twelve categories of understanding. In fact all the cases of knowledge are conditioned through these forms. The situation is comparable to one's conditioned visual experience through red tinted spectacles. These forms and categories are not applicable in case of noumenon. Hence we cannot get knowledge about noumenon. The world of experience and knowledge is the very phenomenon. The absolute truth Brahman and the apparent truth world are comparable to the Kantian notion of noumenon and phenomenon.

Vivekananda was a man of extreme faith and reliance on Indian philosophical ideas though he made frequent relevant references to the then modern western philosophy. The conditional human knowledge have their limitations which is exposed in the conception of Māyā, and which shows, in other words that the Absolute is beyond this Māyā and we with all our capabilities remain bound by Māyā. Māyā is the condition inevitable, Māyā is the very causation. In this respect Vivekananda praises Kant by saying that "Kant's great achievement was the discovery that time, space and causation are modes of thought but Vedānta taught this idea ages ago and called it Māyā."¹⁴ But Māyā is dependent, hence there must be an independent truth on which this maya and its product this universe rests.

In reality, there is only one truth Brahman, all differences, duality arise out of ignorance i.e. māyā. "We say that all the variety is created

by name and form; yet when we want to grasp and separate it, it is nowhere. We can never see name or form or causes standing by themselves. So this phenomenon is Māyā something which depends on the noumenon and apart from it has no existence."¹⁵

There is only one truth independent, self sustaining and all embracing. "In reality, the metaphysical and the physical universe are one, and the name of this One is Brahman, and the perception of separateness is an error."¹⁶ This is the typical Advaita Vedāntic approach to show the limitedness, error, dependence, but to remind the Unity above all differences and distinctions. There is Māyā created separateness, phenomenon and noumenon, paramātmān and jīvātman but above all there is only one atman on whom Māyā can never cast its magic.

This universe is an outcome of name and form. The absolute truth makes different waves of apparent truths. The latter bears manyness of crude name and form. The name and form may disappear but the truth remains the same as the waves may vanish but the ocean subsides. "So though the name and form of wave could never be without the water that was fashioned into the wave by them, yet the name and form themselves were not the wave. They die as soon as ever it returns to water. This name and form is called Māyā, and the water is Brahman."¹⁷

The products of māyā, the adopted apparent name and form are entirely dependent on the Brahman. Brahman is in no way dependent on them

Māyā is something creating appearance and disappearance of different individuals or jīvātman." Paramātman as ruling Māyā is Īśvara. Paramātman as under Māyā is jīvātman. Māyā is the sum total of manifestation and will utterly vanish."¹⁸ In this respect of inter-dependence, the philosophical issue of existence and non-existence, reality and unreality comes to the forefront "because, the name and form can never be separated, they can never be said to exist. Yet they are not zero. This is called Māyā."¹⁹

Brahman through Māyā appears to human being as God - whom man worships, makes idol, prays and considers as a superhuman power with definite name and form. It is God who is easily conceivable to common people than Brahman. Vivekananda says, "the personal God is the same Absolute seen through Māyā. That Absolute under the control of nature is what is called as the human soul, and that which is controlling nature is Īśvara, or the personal God. If a man starts from here to see the Sun, he will see at first a little Sun, but as he proceeds he will see it bigger and bigger, until he reaches the real one. At each stage of his progress he was seeing apparently or different Sun; yet we are sure it was the same Sun he was seeing. So all these things are but visions of the Absolute, and as such they are true. Not one is a false vision, but we can only say they were lower stages."²⁰

Vivekananda also holds the view that Māyā conceals the truth. He compares the veil of Māyā as idol of Mā Kālī obstructing the sava (Siba

- the truth) from exposition. Māyā ..." called Prakṛti, or Kālī, represented by a female figure standing with feet on a male figure, indicating that until Māyā lifts, we can know nothing. Brahman is neuter, unknown and unknowable but to be objectified. He covers Himself with a veil of Māyā, becomes the Mother of the Universe, and so brings forth the creation. The prostrate figure (Siva or God) has become sava (dead or lifeless) by being covered by Māyā."²¹

For Vivekananda Māyā though veils the truth "is the energy of the universe, potential and kinetic." This energy is not only veiling but also creative." The Hindu calls this Māyā, the manifestation of God, because it is the power of God."²² It is not at all mind's own production of contemplation. The philosophy of Vedānta" posits three fundamental concepts time, space and causation. From these is constituted Māyā, the essential groundwork of human thought, not the product of thought. This same conclusion was arrived at a later date by great German philosopher Kant."²³ Knowledge is possible within the framework of Māyā. It is such a delusive power which breaks own net of delusion itself. Swamiji says "All knowledge (so called) being based on Māyā, is a vicious circle, and in time that very knowledge destroys itself."

Metaphysically speaking, Māyā is something real and unreal in the same time from two different stand point. The different of outlook and level of one's own depth of understanding the ultimate truth makes one realise that it is Māyā which is though apparently real and practically conducive

becomes unreal in ultimate turn. Brahman is the only reality unbound and unaffected by Māyā. "This state of human knowledge which embraces within its scope both the external and the internal worlds is called Māyā. It is unreal because it proves its own incorrectness. It is real in the sense of being sufficient for all the needs of the animal man." ²⁴

Vivekananda the great Monist Sannyasi was keenly interested in spreading the ideal of Monism - Brahman is the only ultimate truth. No differential or separateness is inherent within this all embracing truth. But what was the status for the individuals and the worldly creatures within this universe - ~~was~~ a burning question before him to be answered. Unless he could give these created substances an acceptable explanation of status he could not preach and encourage his fellow beings the ideal of self-sacrifice and selfless missionary work. Here lies Swamiji's undaunted effort to explain this māyā-created world not as a mere castle in air but something as manifestation of the Paramātmā the absolute. He says again it is the same absolute which is exposed." There is first, the apparent self (body) second the mental self who mistakes the body for himself (the Absolute bound by Māyā) third, the Atman the ever pure, the ever free."²⁵

Vivekananda vehemently declares "Māyā is not an illusion as it is popularly interpreted. Māyā is real, yet it is not real. It is real in that the real is behind it and gives it its appearance of reality. That which is real in Māyā is the reality in and through Māyā. Yet the reality is never

seen, and hence that which is seen is unreal, and it has no real independent existence of itself, but is dependent upon the real for its existence."²⁶

"Māyā then is a paradox, real, yet not real and illusion, yet not an illusion." To know the real - to lessen the effect of māyā on one Swamiji uttered the importance of unselfish work. However, a man who says universe is hideous māyā - who says māyā is inevitable, fails in great trouble to explain how and why in such world of contradictions, someone would try to perform unselfish work. What benediction would it cause to the human being ? To avoid māyā and the suffering of everyday life the importance of meditation and worship were highly recognised in India till ancient days. But practical work for which Swamiji made a vocal, appeared even to him at first sight something fruitless. "Now, if such be the truth, we are in a state of hopeless contradiction - neither existence nor non-existence, neither misery nor happiness, but a mixture of them. What, then, is the use of Vedānta, and all other philosophies and religions ? And, above all what is the use of doing good work ? This is a question that comes to the mind." Again, "What is the use of doing good ?" - if it were the case that this world would have co-existence of good and evil - it will be mere nonsense talks to say that we should work for good.

But Vivekananda met this contradiction, with his practical philosophical outlook. He pointed out that we all men want to lessen misery, so we must try to be happy. But the only way which makes ourselves

happy is to do good work. Everyone feels its importance - as a weapon to cut the influence of sorrow and unhappiness sooner or later. So the first cause why a man works for good of others is to lessen his own sorrows. Now Vivekananda said, "In the second place we must do our part, because that is the only way of getting out of this life of contradiction."²⁷

Vivekananda repeatedly emphasized that the Vedāntic position is neither pessimism nor optimism. "It does not say that this world is all evil or all good. It says that our evil is of no less value than our good, and our good of no more value than our evil. They are bound together."²⁸ To remain helpless under such a situation is not an ideal praiseworthy. The Agnosticism makes sense enjoyment the only way to be happy but they should be reminded that men are not animals - senses are not the whole. Sense enjoyments being within the framework of Māyā can never give that unique state of placidity which a man aims at renunciation. Ideals for some greater cause glorify life with a special dimension. Agnosticists fail to realise this non-sensual part of life.

Mere sensual pleasure can never make man happy. He feels he is bound everywhere and hence wants to make himself free. His idea of superhuman energy, God, is characterised by the very idea of freedom - freedom from bondage, from limitation. This endows him to go beyond māyā. But "Māyā is everywhere. It is terrible. Yet we have to work through it.

The man who says that he will work when the world has become all good and then he will enjoy bliss, is as likely to succeed as the man who sits beside the Ganga and says, "I will ford when all the water has run into the ocean."²⁹ Vivekananda took māyā in the same sense as nature and hence for him, māyā should be tackled in such a way as we tackle nature or natural forces. All pervading, everpresent māyā is there but a man with goodwill should work for others - to attain some higher ideal. The incentive for doing good for others can never be counted as a venture, in general, results in material values and development.

Now the question is, what is the way to realise that 'Māyā is inevitable', is something apparently true? We must seek for the Absolute. "Progression in Māyā is circle that brings you back to the starting point; but you start ignorant and can to the end with all knowledge. Worship of God, worship of the holy ones, concentration and meditation and unselfish work, these are the ways of breaking away from Māyā's net, but we must first have the strong desire to get free."³⁰ He says, "We have grown to think that body making is the end of our efforts. This is Māyā. We must break this delusion and return to our original aim and realise we are not the body - it is our servant."³¹

Man should realise behind the veil of Māyā there is the Absolute truth Brahman. However, each and every person wants to be free which shows in other words that we want to go beyond Māyā and want to realise the

truth. To realise Brahman within oneself, one should purify his heart, for burning latent desires is the first and foremost condition." He gets across Māyā, who gives up all attachments, serves the great ones, lives alone, cuts the bondages of this world, goes beyond the qualities of nature, and depends upon the Lord for even his living."³² Vedānta laid emphasis on the practice of Yoga, Bhakti, Jñāna or selfless work. To a purified heart it becomes obvious that "The real man is the One Unit Existence."³³

This is a philosophical realization in respect of which the question arises what good it (oneness with Brahman and total surrender to him) brings to the world at large. "The next question is to know what comes after realization." "Shall we become inactive, get into a corner and sit down there and die away?"³⁴ Its true, good in the sense of material good is far away from this realization. In fact, the monistic ideal of Advaita Vedānta is such a great philosophical ideal that it gives man great confidence, self reliance and the great realization that everything in universe irrespective of good or bad nature are manifestations of the Brahman. It helps a man to grow within himself sense of love - an emotional back-ground to inspire us in all our work. Vivekananda also says, "In past, present and future Love is greatest."³⁵ Then will feel love for each and everything and "That which is painful and miserable will all vanish; struggles will all depart and go."³⁶ Such a man alone has the right to stand up and say, "How beautiful is this world" ! "He alone has the right to say that it is all good."³⁷

"Thou art That" - the understanding of this principle makes man perfect. "My reality, that of nature and of God, is the same, the difference is in form of manifestation. The differentiation is caused by Māyā. The contour of the shore may shape the ocean into bay, strait or inlet, but when this shaping force or Māyā is removed, the separate form disappears, the differentiation ceases, all is ocean again."

Love, he considered the greatest principle the real outcome of the advaitic realisation of monism in true sense. Love for man in general, irrespective of sects and creeds led him to propagate the ideal of selfless work to serve downtrodden in society. He thus distracted his ideas from the traditional Hinduistic religious and philosophical cult. A man who stands before western world's eye a representative of Indian Religion, and discusses a lot on philosophical theories - could not easily adopt various plans of social development like women education - service to ill, to encourage civic sense even like digging wells, gardening etc. Sister Nivedita points out that the way was initially thorny and it sometimes even seemed to this Great Sannyāsī whether he was going aright by speaking about Advaitic Māyā but trying utmost in his homeland for development of land, upliftment of backward countrymen. Though he was convinced that "How can one work; unless one loves city, country animals; the universe ?"³⁸ Still he suffered sometimes a feeling of despair as resulting from some sort of conflicting ideals. India, this land of spiritual idealism was not ready to accept such an application of philosophical ideas at once in practical life. Nivedita says, "And

the value of the monk who, instead of devoting himself to maintaining the great tradition of the super-conscious life and meditation turns back to help society upwards, has not in the past been clearly understood."³⁹ It was no doubt service like nursing, was a common practice among the disciples of Ramakrishna but, the value of service was highly emphasized by Swamiji's own personal interest and devotional effort.

Swamiji was thus a rare personality who described the world as Māyā. Māyā as not only delusive power, but as a creative energy makes manifestation of the Brahman possible. Māyā inevitable - none can go against its influence unless he realises that it is apparent. He did not lay stress on the definition of Māyā and wanted to describe it in a simple narrative. It is his intensive love for his countrymen, inspired him to free himself but others also. Thus to free others was also considered as one of the goals of his spiritual life. "He who gives up the fruits of work, he who gives up all work and the dualism of joy and misery, who gives up even the scriptures, gets that unbroken love for God. He crosses his river and helps others to cross it."⁴⁰

Sister Nivedita, the great disciple of Vivekananda could realise her master's ideals in their true sense. Referring to Swamiji's lecture and instance on the ideal of the freedom of soul, she points out⁴¹ how it appeared as conflicting to the western ideals of the service of humanity as the goal of individual. Swamiji pointed out before his audiences that no material values of progress and development in the conception

at vogue could be realized by the ideal he preached. Though he explained this world as maya . . . - he emphasized on social development. It was said by Vivekananda himself, "That society is the greatest, where the highest truths become practical. That is my opinion, and if society is not fit for the highest truths, make it so, and the sooner, the better."⁴²

Swamiji's venture was hard to grasp for both the Indian Advaita Philosophers and the Western thinkers alike. Vivekananda's ideal was something anew - being a reconcillation of both Jñāna and Karma to the traditional Hindu mind, that there might remain an important field work for the Māyāvādins - who deny only the ultimate reality of this world. On the other hand, it was something anew also to the Western thinkers as it appeared as denying service to humanity since it denies the reality of this world at large.

It is the fact that the senses sometimes make appearance of this world falsely. Our own experiences of contradictory and incoherent nature also proves it. Still, Vivekananda could not emphasize on the dictum, "Brahma Satya, jaganmithyā" - as reflecting the entire truth of the māyāvāda. This world, though may be a product of hideous māyā can never be negated and none should remain satisfied with his independent motto of self liberation. A man who wants to deny this world as unreal is as ignorant as a man who considers its mundane attractions the ultimate. Thus this māyā-made world is the very fact of inevitable contradictions like reality and unreality, yet it is the very place which makes life

possible. Thus, "He who knows the Real sees in Māyā not illusion, but reality. He who knows not the Real sees in Maya illusion and thinks it real."⁴³ Māyā is some creative energy and the individuals are none but the manifestations of the Brahman.

Māyāvāda should be discussed in the perspective of relevant philosophical problems like what is primordial origin of life or this world. We all know apparently it is a place of innumerable existing enjoyments, ups and downs and is full of vitality. One can well aspire to live an immortal life here, still enjoying a little part of it. Some philosophers held as Democritus in Greece, many is the ultimate principle. The atoms are the primordial factors - they are the origin. There are other group of philosophers who emphasized on the teleological world as equally important and wanted to make a synthesis between the principles of one and many. An organic unity was considered between different world particles. Śaṅkarāchārya was radically different from these two types of philosophers. He introduced a radical reconcilliation between these philosophical ideas. He emphasized that the Reality is one, immutable, unlimited Supreme Being and Bliss. This world of practical experience is somehow ineffable an existence real and not real at the sametime. If it were the case that there remains no individual or world at all - still the Brahman exists as it is. To explain how this world of contradiction was evolved out of the Brahman the only one supreme Reality, Śaṅkarāchārya advocated the theory of māyā and Vivekananda in this respect followed him.

But, Vivekananda's discussion on Māyā gets its real significance in his principle of love and worship in the name of service to humanity. This Sannyāsī was against any attachment and emotional weakness which hampers enthusiastic activity of the human beings. But he was a man of sympathetic heart to support the men who are weak, deprived. This strong heart, self - reliance and human service remind us back to the Lord Great Buddha whom Vivekananda even criticised as gayāsura - as if an evil spirit who did not emphasized on theoretical discussion and imageworship in fact was in disguise in Śamkarācharya. Again Buddha's life and teachings highly inspired Vivekananda to propagate missionary works. Buddha, had he not been present in Vivekananda, Vivekananda would have established himself as traditional theorist engaged in mere sophistry of argumentation. If love and the principle of work and service were absent in Vivekananda, India would have missed the opportunity of establishing its jewels of Advaitism in its real significance. This Śamkaracharya's brilliance with Buddha's principle of love made this great personality as a man of action and a considerate interpreter of philosophical ideas.

Vivekananda thus propagated Neo-Vedāntism and revitalised Vedāntism with his insistence on work and service. Which may be entitled as practical Vedānta. Never did Vivekananda make any clear -cut division between the truth Vyavahārika and pāramārthika. Work was considered as worship of God. Vivekananda's Māyāvada bore a reflection of the influence made by the philosophers like Mill - Kant and Comte though with the

latent elements of Advaitism. It was Comte who said "that man's true unity consisting in living for others. The positive worship has for its main object the development of the feelings conducing such a life." 44

Kant in his philosophy laid great emphasis on the role of the human beings. He compared his achievements as Copernicus did by advancing geo-centric theory instead of heliocentric theory. Accordingly for Kant in case of knowledge human mind plays a great part. It employs Space, Time etc as forms through which knowledge becomes possible. These philosophical ideas were somehow helpful to modulate Neo-Vedāntism with Humanism, resulting in practical Vedāntism.

This synthesis also solved some allied philosophical problems which might cause a challenge in the introduction of Māyāvāda as the most comprehensive theory of this age. This synthesis helped Vivekananda and his followers to realise whom should be approached for worship where should we realise the presence of the absolute truth Brahman.

Vivekananda's explanation of māyā however did not discard away the conception of ethics and morality as the issue is being reasonably questioned by various philosophers. Vivekananda held the view that. "The real individual is the Absolute this personalisation is through Māyā.... Yet even in this Māyā there is always the tendency to get back to the One, as expressed in all ethics and all morality of every nation, because it is the constitutional necessity of the soul. It is finding its Oneness,

is what we call ethics and morality. Therefore we must always practice them."⁴⁵

This realisation of oneness which in Vivekananda's opinion is the principle of ethics and morality is based on the principle of Love - Love others and self sacrifice "In injuring another, I am injuring myself, in loving another, I am loving myself. From this also springs that principle of Advaita morality which has been summed up in one word self abnegation. When a man has become ready even to give up his life for a little, he has reached the perfection which the Advaitist wants to attain, and at that falls away for him, and he will feel his own nature."⁴⁶

We cannot deny this world since it exists throughout all our experiences, we have to work in and through it. The world which we experience is experienced through our senses. If the number of sense organs were changed in us we would have experienced it in some other way. Infact, none can know this world in its real form - this uncertainty is māyā. Scientists with theories of conflicting opinions also validate Vivekananda's conception that what we know in this world as real are not the absolute or ultimate since everything in māyā. Knowing this one can acquire liberation i. e. satisfaction of life through his work and self sacrifice.

Vivekananda was a consistent reformer and his main aim was the emancipation of the toiling masses of his country. His world outlook had infused new elements of moral consciousness generated in the process of the general transformation of moral norms of the feudal society. Vivekananda

criticised orthodox beliefs but never meant abrogating them. He tried to find an inner religious conviction than an outer one which might be resulted in the development of India's social and national life. For Swami Vivekananda ethics was determined by religion and the dependence can be traced in the metaphysical conceptions of Vedānta system. "My idea is to show that the highest morality and unselfishness goes hand in hand with the highest metaphysical conception."⁴⁷ Again it was only Advaita Vedānta, which could give a satisfactory explanation of the moral norms and real essence of morality. Vivekananda's reliance on traditional ideas was however influenced by Bhāgavat Gītā, which emphasizes the world of man's thoughts and springs of action. He used Vedāntist categories and principle in the process of revaluation and reconsideration. He reinterpreted the notion of māyā and his conception of nature and essence of morality bears the unity of the transcendental and the immanent spiritual principles as expressed in the mahāvākya 'Tattvamasi.' It also accentuated the importance of personality, free will in respect of choice and action, which resulted in the reconsideration of the individual's role in society.

Vivekananda declared that "The real individual is the Absolute" discussing the definition of the category "Self."⁴⁸ It emphasizes the unity with Brahman and aimed at non-acceptance of individualism with the objective of physical and moral inclinations implying distinctions. Vivekananda believed that an individual who performs all his works without seeking any personal benefit

obeying the norms of morality, souls approaching the stage of perfection at which the individual and the universal spiritual principles are identified. Vivekānanda closely connected individuals and the society and contrasted the nature of the "Real Man" with individualist characteristics. He did not dream of individual liberation but dreamed of the general liberation. This resulted in unfolding creativeness and activity aiming at a "Real" state of Jivānmuktas, bearing an anti - individualistic ethical motive testified to definite socio - political tendency generated by the development of the Indian society. Activity should be directed at assuring social welfare of the country and of labouring masses.

Advaita monism was applied in significant way in respect of ethics by Vivekananda. Through getting to understand the divine nature of his self, man learns to regard other people in the same way as himself. General precepts of morality, its categories and principles can be perceived when one understands the Oneness, the One spiritual basis of all existence. "So the Hindus say that(.....)each individual soul is a part and parcel of that Universal soul, which is infinite. Therefore in injuring his neighbour, the individual actually injures himself. This is the basic metaphysical truth underlying all ethical codes."⁴⁹ The very notion of morality should include, according to Vivekananda, the realisation of the one universal substance in this Universe in all animate and inanimate objects.

Vivekananda's ethical ideas were dependent on activity and involved the notion of unselfishness. Vivekananda treated getting rid of selfishness not as illumination of a sadhu who had rejected all worldly cares and

turned to the meditative concentration. He treated it as leading objectively to the unification with the world problems and needs of the country to be apprehended as his own personal wants, which connects selflessness with the active civic position. His ideal was an ideal of Karma-yogin, a selfless, bold strong and dedicated man to deal with practical problems of everyday life. Vivekananda proclaimed, "Those who work without any consciousness of their lower ego are not affected with evil, for they work for the good of the world (). This, secret of Karma-yoga is taught by the Lord Sri Kṛṣṇa in the Gītā."⁵⁰ Thus of four ways of reaching moksha, Bhaktiyoga, Rāja-yoga, Jñāna-yoga and Karma-yoga the last was given precedence because it corresponded in the greatest degree to the contemporary goals and tasks.

Vivekananda concentrated attention on the main idea of the Karma-yoga, that of selfless activity intended to achieve the spiritual and moral ideal. In his ethical outlook this idea comprised not only a call to religious activity intended to achieve the spiritual and moral level at which man realises his identity with the Brahman, but primarily a call to activity directed at social and political goals, "Let us all work hard, my brethren, this is no time for sleep. On our work depends the coming of the India of the future," said Vivekananda in his "Reply to the address of welcome at Ramnad" on January 25, 1897. It aimed at the creation of the ideal of social structure.

Discussing the nature of the Real Man, Vivekananda made it vivid that

morally perfect individual is something different from an "apparent man." He believed that striving towards the Real Man could be traced in every ethical system. This can in other words be aimed at one's ultimate goal. It involved problems of everyday life, world outlook with a balancing attitude towards spiritual and practical life. "The Real Man" is an individual who rises to the highest level of morality and realises his unity with Brahman. With unselfishness as the basic attitude with a realisation to become the Brahman, the Real Man feels "the attainment of this infinite expansion is indeed the goal of all religions and of all moral and philosophical teachings."⁵¹

Those who took the way of Karma-yoga had to practice self-abnegation in the process of their active work for the good of the society. The notion of self-abnegation was clarified by Vivekananda on concrete basis of one's own personal life towards ideal social life, which was developed in a variant course though based on traditional Vedānta. Perfection is achieved by gradual self-abnegation stage by stage. It starts in one's own family life - a man marries and sacrifices for his wife, then for his children, then for his friends and it comes to be matured as the self-abnegation for the sake of his motherland. Not a single of these stages which bring men to the realisation of universal unity should be ignored. That is why Vivekananda argued "Every action of our lives, the most material, the grossest as well as the finest, the highest, the most spiritual is alike tending towards this one ideal, the finding of unity. He has children, he has friends, he loves his

country, he loves the world, and ends by loving the whole universe."⁵² Such an interpretation of the category of self denial meant overstepping the limits of the traditional Vedāntism. That comprises the practical tasks of modern life with socio-political content. It is the positive aspect for the practice of Karma-yoga which interprets māyāvāda to adopt self-abnegation and social service - a new approach in Indian ethics.

Vivekananda's ideal of active life with a view of unselfishness reflected in his instructions bearing both the new and the traditional awareness of them accepted activity useful to society even for the Sannyasin. Though he did not treat, both the grihastha and the Sannyasin always in the same way (sometimes the later nobler), he equalised them insisting that both positions should be treated as equally great since every man who discharges his duties will deserve highest appreciation.

In case of the Sannyasin also, he wanted to preach a new mode of life than a traditional one. That is to be realised living in this world, and for the world, investing themselves with the mission of bringing enlightenment and liberating peoples from ignorance. This should involve a negative outlook, that is directed not towards life and essential duties but towards attachment of any personal need. The Sannyasin should be the torch-bearers of better future who should wake masses to activity and put them up to struggling for the material and spiritual renaissance of India. Vivekananda disclosed his plans thus, "with this object in

view I shall establish a Math to train Sannyasins, who will go from door to door and make the people realise their pitiable condition by means of facts and reasoning, and instruct them in the ways and means for their welfare, and the same will explain to them as clearly as possible, in very simple and easy language, the higher truths of religion. The mass of people in our country is like the sleeping Leviathan."⁵³

Though conforming to the principles of Vedānta, the philosopher believed that everyman should in realising his divine self strive to demolish his ego-consciousness, lethargy and act for the sake of others. In this respect his insistence on Karma, rajas vṛtti of human beings was notably original and non-traditional. The traditional ideal of perfection can be achieved and that is the most important part of the thinkers teaching by an individual who actively breaks into social life and whose moral opinions correspond to the needs and wants of his country at a certain stage of its development.

Vivekananda's views as considered contain an admission of humanism, equality and other higher ideas with an objective approach though different from Western outlook. The later according to him need a foundation of higher spirituality of which the Vedāntic religio-ethical principles led the basis by its monistic ideal "But a morality, an ethical code, derived from religion and spirituality, has the whole of infinite man for his scope (the 'Infinite' refers to the eternal and limitless Divine self () as it applies to the individual (), it must necessarily apply

to the whole of society, in whatever condition it may be at any given time."⁵⁴

Vivekananda always insisted on the practical basis of ethical rules insufficiency of metaphysical ideals, and precepts devoid of active involvement. He rejected feudal ethics with its contempt of physical labour. He preached the awakening of India's people masses and considered labour, work a necessary condition for realising it. Strength was envisaged as a complicated combination of the internal and the external, the physical and the spiritual in which the later must be dominant.

Vivekananda's life was, as we all know enlightened by his great master Ramkrishna Paramhansadev. He however made his great disciple's intellect and heart synthesized and determined his unique aim of life. This may be narrated in Sister Nivedita's version "Once in his boyhood, Sri Ramkrishna had asked 'Noren, as he was then called, what was his highest ambition in life, and he had promptly answered," to remain always in Samādhi." His master, it is said, received this with a smile. "I thought you had been for something greater my boy."⁵⁵ And this greater aim transformed superconscious life of an advaitist "akin to common life" which has been remarkably reflected in his māyāvāda as the assimilation of the principles of knowledge, love and work.

CONCLUSION :

Saccidānanda Brahman is the only Reality; consequently this world becomes unreal - it is the basic idea of the Absolute Advaitism. Manyness is outrightly denied but we can perceive the world, the peoples around us who are many, who are full of many qualities. The world is being described as mithyā in the sense that it is māyā or sadsābilaskṣana i.e. incapable of being described as real or unreal. It is ineffable. Infact, unless we deny the absolute reality of the world, this will contradict the unconditioned reality of Brahman. Hence the former is māyā.

Swami Vivekananda accepted the main tenets of Advaita Vedāntism. But it is noteworthy that he conceived māyāvāda in his own ways of thinking. According to Vivekananda māyā is not at all a thesis, but the statement of real facts. These facts are described in this way. Firstly, human capacity is nothing but a limitation. He in successive stages of his life becomes aware that, his Knowledge is mere relative - he cannot grasp the Absolute. Again death is inevitable still men crave for life. They at every step are proceeding towards death still struggle to live more and more. In this nothing is good or bad by their own characteristics - they are made and are being treated as good or bad under circumstances. These all are māyā. The co-existence of contrary and contradictory qualities in life is māyā. It is logic which denies their co-existence, but it is life which sustains through these

oppositions. This is māyā "Māyā is the statement of the fact of this universe, how it is going on."⁵⁶ Any theoretical question regarding why there is māyā, when from it starts is to be discarded away as useless fantasies.

Vivekananda's explanation of māyā was not at all a definition, undoubtedly he himself considered this issue as an important one. Specially in his second lecture in London (1896) Vivekananda wanted to present his view "By Māyā is thus meant that shimmering, elusive, half-real, half-unreal complexity, in which there is no rest, no satisfaction, no ultimate certainty, of which we become aware through the sense and through mind as dependent on the senses."⁵⁷

As a monist Vivekananda believed that one is Absolutely Real - 'Ekamevāditiyam'. But for him this should be substantially backed by another dictum "Sarvaṁ Khalldaiṁ Brahman." The products of māyā are entirely dependent on Brahman for their existence and adopt name and form though Brahman remains ~~predicate~~less. Māyā veils the truth. Knowledge is possible in māyā-made conditioned world it is this knowledge which itself removes its own barrier. Māyā is not Absolutely real, as it is dependent on Brahman, still "Māyā is not an illusion, as it is popularly interpreted. Māyā is real, yet it is not real."^{57a} It might be called as a paradox.

In this world of contradiction, Vivekananda wanted to preach an ideal

of knowledge and action (jñāna and Karma). He was a consistent reformer and his main aim was the emancipation of the toiling masses. Thus his advaitism resulted in a neo-Vedāntism with a specific ideal of ethics and morality. His social and moral views had great influence on all the various layers of Indian society. Though knowledge of oneness or identity is the first and foremost ground of any activity, still he interpreted Karma-yoga differently from traditional doctrine, especially different from the ethics of Śaṅkara's Advaitism. He set up Karma-yōga as one of the most important path of self-perfection. Activity should be directed at assuring social welfare of the country and of labouring masses. Consequently the traditional ascetic ideal of Sannyasin was incorporated with the ideal of social welfare, fellow feelings and practical sense of life. There should be an attitude of self-assurance in dealing the actual problems of life. Thus the main principle of realising man's spiritual self, of his self perfecting was self abnegation and self sacrifice towards the end of an ideal society.

But, with reference to Vivekananda's explanation of māyā as inevitable, and as he described evil is everywhere, no unwanted influences are to be totally abolished - each and everything has its own value etc., he himself raised the question "Now, if such be the truth, we are in a state of hopeless contradiction neither existence, nor non-existence ... what, then, is the use of Vedānta, and all other philosophies and religions ? And, above all what is the use of doing good work ? "Again, he himself dissolved his problem by assuring that doing good for others a man

can go beyond his own sufferings. His approach in this regard was not of Agnoists. It is not sensual pleasure which can give us satisfaction nor it is inactivity which is envisaged. "Māyā is everywhere. It is terrible. Yet we have to work through it."⁵⁸ The man who works with the realisation of oneness but works for others is a man who bears in heart the fellow-feeling, love for others to which Vivekananda himself was an exemplary character. With such qualities a man is to be called as a man Real - distinguished from apparent man.

Love results in self-sacrifice and it is in otherwords an outcome of the realisation that "Thou art that." However his ideal of practical Vedānta was not easily accepted in India as converscent with its traditional spiritual goal. He himself was aware of this problem but didnot give up his conviction that self-meditation or one's own salvation can never be an ideal acceptable to masses. He was highly influenced by his great master Ramkrishna Paramhansadeva that dedication and self-less service towards the downtrodden peoples was the true ideal of a man - whom we have mentioned as Vivekananda addressed as a Real man. This was the 'greter aim' for which Ramakrishna remoulded the life of this great disciple from an ascetic, super-conscious man to a man of love and action with the equal emphasis on knowledge. This resulted in upholding creativeness and activity aiming at a "Real" state of Jivan-muktas, bearing an anti-individualistic ethical motive testified to a definite socio-political tendency generated by the development of the Indian society. Such an ideal could not deny the world as illusion.

On the contrary it emphasized that, there is one universal spiritual substance in this Universe in all animate and inanimate object.

Vivekananda's conception of māyā with its ethicomoral implications was highly influenced by various personalities and philosophers of East and West. It is sometimes spoken in an abusive approach that it was Buddha who was in disguise in Śaṅkarāchārya in propagating his māyāvāda as an illusion. But, in Vivekananda it is also traceable that Buddha's principle of love and self-abnegation with the end of service to society highly influenced the former. It in otherwords might be told that even if it were the case that Buddha in disguise resulted in Śaṅkara's Māyāvāda, it Buddha disguised in Vivekananda presented the modern India Neo-Vedāntism as Practical Vedānta, with a special dimension towards the concept of māyā and ethics. The great influence which Ramkrishna Paramhansadeva caused on Vivekananda (of which we have already mentioned before) was no doubt immense and unparalleled.

Again Vivekananda was undoubtedly influenced by the great, eminent, Western philosophers like Kant, Mill and Comte. The conditioned character of one's own knowledge, the distinction of phenomenon and noumenon we have noticed were latently present in his philosophical ideas. Vivekananda's ideal of self-activity, social development were comparable to Comte's ideas of 'living for others.'

NOTES

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9. Question & Answer ... Selected Works P 92
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21. Swami Vivekananda's Works Vol. VII - P 23
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37. Ibid P 138
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39. The Master As I Saw Him P 34
40. Complete Works, Vol VI ... P 153
41. The Master As I Saw Him ... P 6
42. Complete Works, Vol - II ... P 85
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44. A Catachism of Positivism by A Comte, Quoted by Dr. Asit Kumar Banerjee in Swami Vivekananda Smarak Grantha, Calcutta, Viswabani, 1964, P 181
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56. Māyā & Illusion, Selections P 106
57. The Master As I Saw Him P 16
- 57a) Complete Works, Vol. VI, P 92
58. The Second Lecture of Swami Vivekananda on Māyā & Illusion (1896) in London.