

CHAPTER-VII

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NATURE OF VIVEKANANDA'S SOCIALISTIC TREND

VEDANTIC SOCIALISM

Vivekananda wanted to fulfill the Advaitic concept of unity in the social and political life. He believed that by the process of unity a harmonious society could be established. He was convinced that socialism could establish a just society by eliminating inequalities through the spirit of love and social oneness. His concept of socialism postulates the social theory of class-cooperation and unity and pleads for the recovery of original caste system for performing socialistic functions of society. According to Vivekananda, "The doctrine which demands the sacrifice of Individual freedom to social supremacy is called socialism.....".¹

Vivekananda found in socialism the key to social unity and economic justice. It is only the principle of justice-social, economic and political – that inspired him to proclaim himself as a socialist. "I am a socialist not because I think it is a perfect system, but half a loaf is better than no bread."² In the words of B.N. Dutta, "Swamiji called himself a socialist, and so far it is known, he was the first Indian to designate himself as such".³ Vivekananda championed it as the movement of

liberation of masses. Social liberation may also be described "as social justice for justice is the just ordering of things. Justice may be viewed either as an end in itself or merely as a means. To Swami Vivekananda, social justice implies both. It is an end, because it is an index of purity of social relation; it is a means for it is the condition of development both of the individual and society".⁴

Vivekananda believed that the establishment of socialism was to be preceded by mass awakening through education. He pinned his faith in the mass education. Sacred and secular pleaded for the restoration of their lost individuality. He was of the view that when the masses were educated, they would become conscious of their rights, improve their abilities, establish their Government and solve the problems of society. Vivekananda's approach towards the masses was creative and democratic. As mass awakening was to be gradual and peaceful; the ushering of a socialist society was to be achieved by peaceful means. His socialism thus stands for self-reliance and self-rule of the masses. Mass awakening brings with it a new culture and civilization. Though Vivekananda realized that Proletarian culture and civilization would be a degenerated one, he welcome it for its being based on social liberation of the masses.

Spiritual Basis of Socialism

Vivekananda was of the view that social and political ideas and institutions were not eternal and they would face decay and death, if they failed to adapt to changing conditions and circumstances. However to make them effective and lasting and to create a dynamic society, he pointed out that they must be laid on a spiritual basis. As far as India was concerned, he made it clear that religion took precedence here over politics. He proclaimed that his "mission is to show that religion is everything and in everything".⁵ He declared that religion was not in books and observance of social rituals but in the realization of spiritual oneness in social life. Accordingly he postulated his socialism or the spiritual basis of social unity with its concomitants of freedom and equality.

The Vedantic concept of unity, which postulates freedom and equality, encouraged Vivekananda to espouse socialism. He thought that Vedanta was conducive to the efflorescence of socialism. "Vivekananda affirms that the Vedanta can furnish all the modern communistic or equalizing theories with a spiritual basis."⁶ Both socialism and Vedanta aim at human equality, freedom and unity and both advocate the upliftment and liberation of the masses from social political and economic bondage and exploitation.

Vivekananda's versatile and volatile neo-Vedanta negated neither freedom nor equality nor accepted any one of them to the exclusion of the other. Vedanta made Vivekananda a liberal in heart and a socialist in content. He reconciled the liberal idea of freedom with the socialist fascination for equality by means of the spirit of oneness and love. Liberalism, which stands for individual freedom and dignity, provides the thought and socialism the means of a just society. Socialism is rootless without individual freedom and liberalism is growth less without accepting socialist concept of economic equality. Socialism is thus an expansion of liberalism. Vivekananda improved socialism by emphasizing the modesty and necessity of the liberals, concept of individual freedom and improved liberalism by infusing into it the concept of just economy based on equitable distribution of wealth. Through the acceptance of individual freedom. Vivekananda has recognized himself as a un-Marxism socialist. The Marxism socialism admits of no individual freedom.

According to Swamiji, society is a natural institution and he is in agreement with Aristotle that man is by nature a social animal. The naturalistic view of the Swamiji has been interpreted as the Hindu view of society, which asserts that society is created and ordained by God. In respect of society, the importance question that generally comes out is that what is meant by socialism. The presentation of clear-cut definition is difficult because- "Socialism means four closely connected things - (i) a human fellowship which denies and expels

distinctions of class; (ii) a social system in which no one is so much richer or poorer than his neighbours as to be enable to mix with them on equal terms; (iii) the common ownership and use of all the vital instruments of production; (iv) and an obligation upon all citizens to serve one another according to their capacities.”⁷

Swami Vivekananda witnessed every where in India, the crippling poverty, the paralyzing slavery and the inhuman exploitation of the masses, the hypocrisy and priest craft – all these made him look up to the Philosophy of socialism as a probable ray of hope, if not as permanent sunshine. He knew well that there was no solution to the complex problems that confronted humanity. His attitude towards socialism has been neatly summed up in this famous sentence: “I am a socialist, not because it is a perfect system, but because I believe that half a loaf is better than no bread.”⁸

To discuss Swamiji’s concept of socialism, let us see how he perceives the course of history. He says, “From a careful study of the history of the world, it appears that in conformity to the line of nature, the four castes, the Brahman, the *Kshatriya*, the *Vaishya* and the *Shudra* do in every society and one after another in succession, govern the world”.⁹ He remarks that caste is socialistic because it is based on social unity. It functions on the Principle of social and economic coordination and

not or rivalry of castes. The caste system as a socialistic institution promotes individual liberty and equality of opportunity.

The Brahmin Caste was the spiritual mentor and natural leader of society. The priestly order was based on the principal that knowledge is power. The *Kshyatriya* who succeeded the Brahmins developed urban civilization, promoted arts and sciences and ruled the people with paternal love. But later on kings two became selfish and ignored the Interests of the Community. The struggle between the king and people resulted in the establishment of *Vaishya* rule. The *Vaishyas* established international contacts and spread the fruits of knowledge. But the *Vaishya* power as its predecessors alienated itself from society and it was replaced by the *Shudra*, the proletarian. Vivekananda thought that it was the time for the rise of the *Shudras* and nobody could resist it. He stressed on the concept of the four fold Vedic social order – known as '*Chatur Varna*', which he described as the 'law of nature'. Of course he did not approve of the rigid, Orthodox, Petrified classification as it developed in Post-Vedic India, when the social order lost its dynamism and became fossilised. Yet he understood and accepted it as a tool for his Comprehension and interpretation of social evolution, not only in India but all over the world.

Here we can compare Vivekananda's socialism with Marx's Socialism. Marx gave unqualified support to socialism. He believed that religion was the opium of mankind and that it must be done away within the interest of human welfare. But Swami Vivekananda thought just the other way; his concept of socialism was in no way antithetical to religion. His socialism was based on the Vedantic view. He thought that religion goes to the roots of the matter. He says, "Socialism, as conceived today is a Product of materialism, but the present crisis is not merely in the outside world, but also in the soul of man and it can be resolved only by religion which raises man to the divine state".¹⁰

There is yet another fundamental difference between Swami Vivekananda and Karl Marx in their concept of Socialism. According to Vivekananda, "Freedom is the only condition of growth". Take that off, the result is degeneration". He says emphatic stress on the growth of the individual where as Marx lays the entire stress on centralized society or cumulative life. But ideal social life cannot be achieved if the individual has to sacrifice his soul or individual existence.

Probably the basic difference between the socialism as envisaged by Marx and that by Vivekananda is that the latter had based his concept on Advaita Vedanta whereas Marx had a materialistic

substratum. Vivekananda's Socialism is not a form of patriotism which has application to India alone, but it is of universal character as both a Panacea and a formula of growth. Thus it is democracy that is Vivekananda's ideal society and given the existence of political organisation it is his ideal state as well. His socialistic ideas pertain to this view of democracy, but a keen humanitarian sympathy induced him to accept the *Shudra* rule, which he found, in some form or other, was coming on the boards as socialism and to recommend it was to be given a four trial; for the novelty of the thing at least. But while socialism was a kind of creed to Marx, this was not so with Vivekananda, it was a new means of bringing out a social change to meet the demands of the changing society. More than that socialism, for Vivekananda, had no permanent efficacy in the historical development of mankind.

Reference

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