

Chapter Four

Vivekananda on Vibrant Humanism

The Essence of Vivekananda's Humanism

There is no question of doubt the concept of humanism is a multifaceted concept. Accordingly, there we notice different interpretations of humanism. We have seen that Roy developed his humanism from Marxist's point of view. His interpretation is socio-economic in nature. We have again found a different interpretation of humanism in Ambedkar's philosophy. Ambedkar gives importance on political, social and economic justice based on the trio-concepts, such as, liberty, equality and fraternity. In one hand, he gives a different interpretation of religion, morality and in other sense; he tries his level best to ensure social justice in fulfilling human rights. However, when we delve into the humanism of Swami Vivekananda, we find a different approach. Vivekananda, in fact, approaches a kind of humanism attributed as 'vibrant' humanism which eventually allows everyone to make known the inherent divinity with utmost care and consistency. The main objective of Vivekananda's humanism is to get hold of permanent peace and harmony amongst all sections of people, such as, the poor and the rich, the high and the low, the depressed, the oppressed, the advantaged as well as disadvantaged. Thus, Vivekananda understands humanism in an inclusive sense. In the true sense of the term, his revelation of humanism incorporates society and education, religion and aesthetics, spiritualism and mysticism. Thus, his humanism is totalistic or holistic in nature of which ultimate

objective is to restore peace and harmony among all and every section of people.

Unlike Ambedkar's humanism which is based on liberty, equality and fraternity, Vivekananda gives importance on the spirit of oneness backed up by the aesthetic spirit of truth, beauty and goodness. Thus, unlike Roy and Ambedkar, Vivekananda's humanism is spiritualistic in nature. Vivekananda has a high regard to the inherent divinity of man. Accordingly, he believes to establish the greatest and the most desirable qualities, i.e. virtues, of every man. His humanism actually hinges on the trio-concepts, such as, soul, God and religion. In fact, Vivekananda opines that realisation of soul, God and religion in the most intrinsic sense is the true realisation of humanism. That is why, Vivekananda wishes to stabilise humanism in terms of the trio-concepts, such as, soul, God and religion. Vivekananda realises that these three concepts altogether can help man to realise his inner divinity. Here we can mention a clearcut distinction between Ambedkar and Vivekananda. As we have seen that like Vivekananda, Ambedkar does not have any faith on God, soul. However, like Vivekananda, Ambedkar also admits the relevance of religion. Ambedkar understands religion in terms of morality or in terms of fraternity. Vivekananda understands religion in terms of universal religion. What the humanism of Vivekananda has sought, is not merely theoretical; it is extremely relevant in the day to day actual affairs of life.

The point that needs to be addressed here is that in what sense Vivekananda brings back the notion of human divinity in day to day actual affairs of life.

At times he claims that the very objective of humanism is to unearth human divinity and at other times he claims that humanism is linked with day to day actual affairs of life. Normally, human soul or God or religion crosses the horizon of human consciousness and reality so much so that the concept of soul or that of God or religion becomes narrower. The concept of soul or God remains far away from practical humanism or social or democratic humanism as expounded by Ambedkar or proletariat humanism as comprehended by Roy. What then we think of Vivekananda's religion? His religion is the religion of man; his religion is the religion of "the best efflorescence of man who is always devoted to excellence and ascent in all directions."⁶⁵ As a proponent of universal religion, Swami Vivekananda develops universal humanism through which the divinity of human can reveal and in turn the newer image of man can be explored. He comprehends humanism in terms of universal religion where a Hindu monk crosses the narrow boundaries of religion of a particular community, a particular sect or society and in turn merges into *a religion of all religions*. In this sense his religion is a kind of forward moving motion or development where a religious monk can transcend his narrower bond of religion and can merge towards religions, what he terms as 'universal religion'. Thus, Vivekananda's humanism is not at all a religion, but as religions, it is the religion of all religions through which the voice of human divinity or human dignity or human eternity can be revealed. Universal religion is a kind of religion in which every people of the

⁶⁵ Chakrabarti, Mohit. *Swami Vivekananda Vibrant Humanism*, Kanishka Publishers, New Delhi, 2001, p.2.

society or community irrespective of caste, creed, can take part. Therefore, the essence of humanism would be reflected with the practice of universal religion.

It is important to observe here that the very objective of Vivekananda's humanism is directed to the all round development of humanity, human divinity. His humanism is a merger of All Serene, what he terms as *Naranarayana*. *Nara* means man and *Narayana* means God. He understands human divinity in terms of God. He believes that God is within man. Accordingly, the spirit of humanism always fosters the spirit of the divinity in all possible avenues of excellence. In fact, Vivekananda prefers to make an adventure of humanism in the very social set-up. For him individual divinity is the true revelation of God (*Narayana*), i.e. the very truth of humanism. As every man is the real representative of God (*Narayana*), every man should bear responsibilities in the best possible means of everyone else in the society. According to Vivekananda, true humanism is the true vision of God arising or revealing from within. Therefore, he gives importance on the inner cultivation of man. Education, for Vivekananda, is the means of cultivation of inner self, a most important and crucial vehicle of efflorescence of humanism. Man experiences the spirit of humanism by means of cultivation of mind through proper education. In this sense education is the central point of humanism as education alone can unfold the image of the All Serene. Education, Vivekananda opines, is not only a pointer of developing individual humanism, it also helps one to be a part of global humanism.

through the manifestation of inward excellence. Religion would be an integral part of Vivekananda's education because Vivekananda thinks that like education, religion too helps one to find the path of doing right action. Vivekananda claims that education, religion and humanism are entwined with each other. True humanism is the outcome of true education and true religion. That is why Vivekananda does not make any significant difference between education and religion from the standpoint of humanism. According to Vivekananda, education is nothing but religion and humanism too from humanistic viewpoint is supposed to be a religion.

It can be said that Vivekananda's humanism is more sophisticated because his own apprehensions on religion are changing the mind of man. Problems can only be solved in the mind of man. No law will ever make him do what he does not want to do. It is only he wills to be good than he will be good. All the law and juries cannot make him good. The almighty man says, "I do not care".⁶⁶ All knowledge is within mind. We are all mind. Every drop has the whole of the ocean in it. That is the mind of man.⁶⁷ Thus, for Vivekananda, proper action of mind is the hallmark of individual divinity. Individual must have the capacity to master over his own mind and if he can do this then humanism alone finds its living and dynamic manifestation in humankind. Vivekananda says, "Perfection is only possible if the mind of man is changed, if he, or of his own sweet will, changes his mind; and the

⁶⁶ Vivekananda, *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Advaita Ashrama, Calcutta, Mayavati Memorial Edition, 1989, Vol.1, P.509.

⁶⁷ Ibid. '509.

great difficulty is, neither can he force his own mind.”⁶⁸ Vivekananda firmly believes that every individual can become divine and this can happen only if the individual can earn the mastery or command over his own thoughts. Only then the individual can realise that thoughts or sense are his servants, not masters. In this way evils will vanish. Education is not filling the mind with a lot of facts, rather true education helps one immensely of acquiring complete mastery or authority of his own mind. This is the ideal of education.

According to Vivekananda, the conquest of mind is the conquest of self through which best thoughts, best ideas, best endeavour and best devotion is made possible. This is how man’s emancipation is made possible. It is the only means through which one’s own self merges in the *voidless void*, what Vivekananda terms as *swayambhu*- i.e. the vision of the Divine Being in one’s own being. We think such approach of Vivekananda has a similarity with Heidegger’s concept of Being. When Vivekananda speaks of *Tat Tamhosi*, he actually conceives man as the Divine Being who exalts humanism in the spirit of the best way up. Vivekananda always envisages humanism of highest order. He addresses a mystic version of humanism which is directed to the fullness of man. His vision of humanism is directed towards voidless void and deserves one’s sustained endeavour for emancipation in every direction to justify the vision of man par excellence. Unlike social and economic humanism, Vivekananda emphasises mystical and spiritual humanism. In this regard, he has adopted two-fold approaches,

⁶⁸ Ibid. p.510.

the first one being that of education of the best order and the second one, society of the highest order. Such mystical and spiritual humanism actually opens up a new dimension to the role of man for spirituality manifested in life and work. Spiritual humanism is the outcome of the purification of self where the sense of beholding of consciousness acts like a perpetual beckoning of fullness prominently revealed in his vision of humanism. Having said this Vivekananda introspects on humanism in the light of the global peace and all-round well-being of mankind:

Sarve sukhino bhavantu sarve santu niramayah

Vivekananda equally understands humanism in the sense of altruism. His humanism is qualified as altruism because it encourages peace amongst all irrespective of perceptible differences. Peace, according to Vivekananda, is a matter of *living faith* in humanism. Vivekananda opines that no two persons are different as far as divinity or divine force is concerned. Vivekananda also extends the spirit of humanism as a prominent one for the advancement of peace in exploring and extending inwardness of vision in the void which again in turn gets a finer platform of ascent and beyonding in the voidless *void-Samadhi* as he would like to identify.

According to Vivekananda, religion is the foundation of humanism. He, however, does not understand religion in the context of temple, or church or mosque or any other place of divine service. Rather he interprets religion as *the heart of the society* where humans are associated with diverse activities,

where every man and woman irrespective of status is to be given the glory of God. In a letter to Swami Akhandananda , Vivekananda advises, “ Go from door to door amongst the poor and lower classes...and teach them religion. Also let them have oral lessons on Geography and such other subjects. No good will come sitting idle and having princely dishes, and saying “Ramakrishna, O Lord”- unless you can do some good to the poor. Go to other villages from time to time, and teach people the art of life as well as religion. Work, worship and *Jnana* (knowledge) – first work, and your mind will be purified; otherwise everything will be fruitless like pouring oblations on a pile of ashes instead of the sacred fire...It is preferable to live on grass for the sake of doing good.....You must give your body, mind, and speech to “the welfare of the world”. You have read “*Matridevo Bhava Pitridevo bhava*” – Look upon your mother as God, look upon your father as God- but I say “*daridradevo bhava, murkhodevo bhava*” (The poor, the illiterate, the ignorant, the afflicted – let these be your God). Know that service to these alone is the highest religion.”⁶⁹

As a radical and vibrant humanist, Vivekananda understands humanism from the realistic point of view. In his humanism he allows diversities in thoughts and opinions so that the process of thinking of individual enjoys interrupted freedom. Endearing humanity in one’s own fashion and thinking in one’s own way of life and actions is the *sine qua non* of humanism. Vivekananda promotes a kind of humanism which caters to the nursing of thinking in the

⁶⁹ Ibid. p.288.

best way of one's creative and critical efflorescence of perfection. Humanism helps one to realise the inherent strength with which one is divinely blessed.

Vivekananda further contends that we are infinite beings bearing the torch of humanism. But how does a man become infinite? According to Vivekananda, the concepts such as finite and infinite; strong and weak; great and weak are all relative in nature. What is true is that all things are interpenetrated by that infinite ocean and their reality is that infinite. Everything on the surface is infinite; the tree is infinite; everything that exists is infinite. Infinite is finite and finite is infinite. This is all about of our existence. Who can ever think that he can be annihilated or he will die? None can. Misery comes because we think that we are finite. The humanism of Vivekananda does not allow man to be lost. His concept of God is also ingrained in the spirit of the Divine Being. As a matter of fact, he does not think that God is separated from man and vice-versa. According to Vivekananda, man as man is existent in God and God as God can never be apart from man. Man is infinite because the question of God's existence is one of self-existence. As God is part of man, inherent in man, God is the Self, the Divine Self and Ever Serene Self who always highlights the glory or dignity of humanism. Thus, by conceiving God as the Divine Self in man, Vivekananda speaks of the real infinite. As every man is infinite, no man was ever bound. You are the one, there are no two. God was your own reflection cast upon the screen of *Maya*. The real God is the Self. The Father in heaven is God. It is because He is your own reflection.

Vivekananda thus gives a mystic vision of man by conceiving man as an integral part of God. In this sense, Vivekananda extends the light of vision in the light of beyonding of consciousness. Here man's position has been clarified in terms of worship. According to Vivekananda man-God relationship is all about of worship. He goes deep into the essence of humanism where the spirit of God finds reverence in nursing of work as worship. In this regard, Vivekananda refers *Karma-yoga* and thereby tells us that the real worship is God's worship. God allows you to work not in order to help Him, but that you may help yourself. The world does not need you at all. The world goes on. You are like a drop in the ocean. Without God, a leaf does not move, the wind does not blow. God is all and in all. We are allowed to worship him.⁷⁰ Thus, worship is a path of revealing God (Self) in man and it is also supposed to be the significant advancement of man. It is an exercise of seeing oneself in the vision of the All Seer. It signifies the essence of humanism. Thus, in a true sense, the essence of humanism is the essence of the self that embraces spiritual life or an ideal life. Vivekananda, in this regard, advises us by saying that live for an ideal, and leave no place in the mind for anything else. If we have true yearning realisation, we must struggle, and through struggle growth will come. He also advises for meditation to acquire spiritual life, because mediation helps one to feel divine nature just like the same way as the touch of the soul can paint the brightest colour even in the dingiest places.

⁷⁰ Ibid. p.245-46.

Education as the Means of Developing Humanism

According to Vivekananda, education is all about of developing humans' mental state. Vivekananda has given much emphasis on education for knowledge that purifies humans and direct them towards going deep into the world of purity and perfection. Education helps one to humanise knowledge; education allows the learner to rise above unreality or *Maya* or illusion. Education is the background of all nations. Proper education alone can build the character of a nation, and also awaken the consciousness of nationality and freedom. The sense of duty actually hinges on proper education. It is education that enables a man to 'be a real and perfect man'. Vivekananda, however, does not have faith on stereotyped system education, he advocates a kind of education that would give real knowledge and means and it will help men to stand on their own feet and make them understand the value of the ideal and principle of their everyday life.

As a means of developing humanism, education should be according to the natural inclination of the individual soul, with the idea that wisdom cannot be drilled into the brain of the individual. Proper educational knowledge would be a process of transmission that does not come from outside. The present system of education is not all relevant as far as the development of humanism is concerned. Real education is not informative or fact based education arising from outside. Real education is the cultivation of inner self. Any education that separate mortals from mortals, and disunites brother from brothers should not be regarded as an ideal education. The aim of education,

Vivekananda opines, is not the mere intellectual culture with commercial ideals, rather it should be such as that will elevate man from the ordinary selfish state into the unselfish universal ideal of Godhood.

Vivekananda has a great faith on the Vedanta's model of education. In this regard, he even criticises the Socrates' model of education. According to Socrates, "My study is the study of man". But how can Socrates know about man without knowing God? There is an answer that a Hindu can give because Hindu alone from ancient times has regarded the individual soul as a part and parcel of the divine Being. The divine spark dwells within us, but we must recognise the divine spark in all methods of education. We must regard the child who is born as a living God; it was created out of nothing, but the soul of the child is the master of his physical body. The soul is eternal, it can never be created. Even Western thinker, like, Christ said, "The kingdom of Heaven is within you." Proper education enlightens you that the whole world is your relatives. This was the message of Christ: Love thy neighbour as thyself. Vivekananda advises us by saying that if your neighbour be a pariah, or a Chandala, or a Brahman, or of any other religion, Christian or Mohammedan, him you should regard as your own self, and him you should love as you love your own self. This is your religion, this is your education. By religion, Vivekananda does not mean any sectarian religion; rather he means universal religion which underlines all sectarian religions whether it is Islam, or Christianity, or Hinduism, or Buddhism. According to Vivekananda, universal religion is nameless and formless, it is the religion of

all religions and it should be brought forward. Reason education should be based upon universal principles and not upon sectarian religious ideals. Sectarian religion degrades humanity. Therefore, the objective of education should be the attainment of perfection. That is the highest aim of education. True education is not the development of *apara vidya* but *para-vidya*. *Para vidya* is that by which one attains to God-consciousness. *Para-vidya* helps one to realise his own self. Self-conquest should be our ideal in training our minds. We should educate our intellect so that we can see the all-pervading Spirit, and reason that although there are various manifestations, yet there is an underlying unity of existence. Unity in variety is the plan of nature and we should discover that plan by proper training of our intellect. Education also helps us to realise what is eternal and what is non-eternal, what is unchangeable and what is changeable. This would be the function of intellect that one can acquire through proper education.

According to Vivekananda, proper education as an all round development of human also includes moral training. The whole of ethics depends upon love, the oneness in spirit. Love means the attraction of two souls, which would vibrate in the same degree just as two musical instruments are kept tuned in the same key and when one is struck the other responds. When the thoughts and ideas, which rise in the mind of the lover, will vibrate in the mind of the beloved and produce similar response, then there is love, and that means oneness in thought and in spirit.⁷¹ When there is true love, there cannot be

⁷¹ See Vide Swami Abhedananda:*Human Affection and Divine Love*.

any selfishness. Love is true essence of humanism because it is process through which we must learn to merge our small personality into the bigger personality of humanity. That should be the ideal of moral education, the spiritual education when one can realise the truth of saying, “I and my father are one”, not physically, not mentally, nor intellectually, but spiritually because spiritually there is only one Spirit in the universe. Accordingly, each soul is potential Christ, potentially Divine; each soul is Brahman.

Vivekananda then quips: Why should you hate a *Chandala*? Why is he a *Chandala*? He became *Chandala* because you wrongly made him so. You can make him Brahmin tomorrow if you allow him all the proper environments of a Brahmin. Do not blame him, because he lives filth and dirt, and is unclean. Why is he so? Because you have made him like that, and now after putting him down in the lowest rank and giving all the conditions that would be degrading to him, you blame him, condemn him, and hate him. You being the leader of the society, dictator of the society, community actually made somebody as a Chandala. You can do this because you fail to realise your own self, you are an ignorant. Here we find the similarity between Ambedkar and Vivekananda. Ambedkar has the same view what Vivekananda has said regarding the designation of a Chandala. Vivekananda advocates proper training, proper education for the Chandala. Vivekananda in this regard mentions the name of Abraham Lincoln, the President of America, who stopped down and picked up that beetle and put it on its legs. He said, “I made that poor fellow stand on its own foot”. That is the human

nature. Vivekananda therefore wishes everyone would become an Abraham Lincoln. According to Vivekananda, if you see a poor man, make him stand on its own legs, give him the proper opportunity; do not indulge any kind of tyranny over him, do not call him names, do not condemn him, but love him as you love your own self. If you can do, then as a human, you are worthy of the place you are occupying. To love a poor is to love God, God is not sitting above the clouds, He is here, within every self, and He is the *Virat-Purusha*. The Lord is with infinite eyes, with infinite number of ears, with infinite hands and infinite feet. He sees through all eyes, hears through all ears, works through all hands, and thinks through all minds. The collective spiritual Being is the Lord and if you attempt to separate individuals from the whole, you destroy the relation between the individual and the universe, between man and God. This is the motto of narrow-based religion, the religion that we notice here and there. Like Vivekananda, Ambedkar also claimed that the sole objective of true religion, humanistic religion is to unite society, community and state, but not to separate man from man. Vivekananda also thinks in the same manner. However, this does not make sense to say that Vivekananda's approach of humanism is similar to Ambedkar's approach of humanism. Among much dissimilarity, a few important ones are:

- (a) Ambedkar advocates social and democratic humanism based on liberty, equality and fraternity; on the contrary, Vivekananda develops spiritual humanism.

(b) Ambedkar's humanism was predominant confined to the all round development of the Untouchables mainly in the first order level; whereas Vivekananda's humanism is directed to the mankind in general. In this regard, the application of Vivekananda's humanism is wider in scope than Ambedkar.

(c) Ambedkar was vocal against the role of God, soul, etc. in religion; but Vivekananda was not vocal against God, soul, etc. in religion.

(d) Vivekananda's humanism is based on the essence of Vedanta; the *highest mantra*; whereas Ambedkar was not an ardent believer of Vedanta.

(e) Vivekananda gives importance of the inner cultivation of human soul; whereas Ambedakar has given priority on social, economic and political rights.

According to Vivekananda, education is all about of self. Vivekananda's practical approach to education for vibrant humanism always heralds the glory of education of the self that prompts man how to rise above the narrow self and work untiringly for the cause of the good of one and all. He conceives education as the education of inwardness of the self, education that necessitates the true knowledge of the self. We must learn how to turn the eye to see inwards to notice the glory of the Lord. There is only one Infinite, only one Self and realisation this Self is true knowledge arising out of perfect education. The Self of all manifests itself in every form. Thus, making education for the well-being of all is an exhilarating task because it encapsulates the sense of humanity and self-destruction which has won the greatest blessing of education of humanism.

Vivekananda envisages a kind of education that has been directed to the unison of the self and the soul. His education is thus attributed as *humanised education* which lifts up one to visualise the souls of every human being merged in *One Soul, One Being, One Divine Soul, One Divine Being*. Vivekananda says, “Its aim is Self-realisation...attained by *Jnana* (knowledge), *Bhakti* (devotion) and so on...”⁷². In outlining the objective of humanised education, Vivekananda says, “Let us pray, “Lead, Kindly Light”- a beam will come through the dark, and a hand will be stretched forth to lead us. I always pray for you: you must pray for me. Let each one of us pray day and night for the downtrodden millions in India who are held fast by poverty, priest-craft and tyranny- pray day and night for them....I am poor, I love the poor. Let these people be your God-think for them, work for them, pray for them....”⁷³ Thus, we can say that Vivekananda’s education for humanism is the religion of all religions aiming at in negotiating the ills of the society, encountering darkness with light, ignorance with knowledge, ego or Aham with altruism and poverty with the blessings of reacting to it with all forces. Education, for Vivekananda, is a force or spirit of humanism.

Humanism in the Eye of Socialism

As Vivekananda gives importance in developing educational based humanism, his vision of humanism allows a man to be men in the society for the very end. A practical social humanist does not want man to be a burden of the society; he

⁷² *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Mayavati Memorial Edition, Advaita Ashrama, Calcutta 1989, Vol.VIII, P.111.

⁷³ Ibid. p.366.

does not want man to be a mere show in the society where every action is artificial. Thus, a *Jiva* becomes the *Shiva* in the human society who sincerely cares for promotion and dissemination of true humanism. His devotion to man and society thus harmonised in oneness in the vision of All Beautiful delivers devotion to true meditation. The sense of oneness to the society can be possible only when we feel from our heart of hearts the inseparable relationship between man and society. With a wide and generous platform of social movement, Vivekananda makes inroads to humanism with some explicit and specific objectives. The role of education for social change should always be backed up by a humanistic pattern of education where each and every member of the society sincerely feels and acts for whatever represents the best and worthiest in advancement of humanism. His concern for man and society is one of human advancement. As a radical social humanist, he expands and evolves a new and enlightened vision of humanism where the vision of God is the vision of man. Such excellence of man always reminds one to be man in man and vice-versa so that the spirit *Bahu jana hitaya* or altruism becomes one of the foremost objectives of social endeavour. He finds man and God in the same platform in the society, and society having its root in man as such, and this clarifies the position of man as a respectable and responsive representative of the All Serene.

As a social reformer, Vivekananda looks upon the process of living as one of togetherness where the lesson of sociability or socialisation is an evolving one from the person to the family expanding the horizon of the self to the universe. Therefore, humanism in the eyes of socialism in general and socialisation of man

in particular becomes an atomic fusion embracing all weal and woe of humanity. In this regard, Vivekananda says, “It is the feeling of a unity towards which we are all going. Every action of our lives- the most material, the grossest as well as finest, the highest, the most spiritual is alike tending this one ideal, the finding of unity.”⁷⁴ Elimination of selfishness is the *sine qua non* of social excellence. It becomes man to be an indissoluble, non-individual and altruistic in ways and means of humanistic endeavour. Accordingly, the sense of socio-aesthetic advancement of man finds manifestation in cultivation of sympathy, goodness and all other components of humane sensitiveness. According to Vivekananda, to build a good society is to do good to others. By doing good to others as a humanist is to actually do good to oneself. Thus, the essence of humanism is from the standpoint of helping others in order to help oneself, which, indeed, justifies one’s endeavour at attaining excellence. Our duty to others means helping others and in turn helping ourselves.

How to make our society truly humanistic? In this regard, Vivekananda gives us a specific suggestion. He emphasises the manifestation of the inherent force of spirituality in every human being so that there is a systematic, gradual and harmonious process of development from the individual to the community, from the community to the society, and from the society to the nation and from the nation to the world at large. Vivekananda says, “All healthy social changes are the manifestations of the spiritual forces working within, and if these are strong

⁷⁴ Ibid. p.4.

and well adjusted, society will arrange itself accordingly.”⁷⁵ The essence of humanism is one of self-realisation where the process of self-evolution always takes place most unassumingly and spontaneously. Self-realisation is a kind of inner development where individual finds no difference between society and humanism. In fact, the seeds of humanism ought to be grown and nurtured in the kindness of socialisation. For Vivekananda, socialisation on the face of humanism is the surest way to achieve objective of honouring man as the best representative of All Serene. Every individual has a role in society and the humanism of an individual is being reflected in terms of the role of the individual in the society. Here the interest of the individual fully merges in that of the society. Humanism is the outcome of self-sacrifice of the individual. Self-sacrifice is an eternal and enduring spirit of any individual who is always prepared to undergo any eventuality for the cause of humanism. Such individual knows how to be true to the society by adjusting himself to the changing needs of sorrows and sufferings. According to Vivekananda, this is obligatory for every sensible person who really wants to be a true member of the society.

Vivekananda further contends that individual life is the life of the whole, the individual happiness is the happiness of the whole; every individual is an integral part of the whole. This is the eternal truth one can learn from spiritualism. There is a spiritual journey from individual self towards universal Self. It is a journey that gives rise to a constant feeling of intense to the individual. It makes an individual life immortal. In this regard, individual must

⁷⁵ Ibid, p.415.

be in a state of mind to deny his own self for the good of the society and it requires a constant vigil of the self to guard oneself against all evils. Each and every member of the society feels in his heart of hearts a genuine urge for whatever scarifies the society needs for the advancement of humanism. In this upward journey, Vivekananda wants from everyone of the society to eliminates all sorts of traditional and age-old sham differences of caste, creed, religion, etc. According to Vivekananda, the true religion of the society is the one and only one, and that is no other than that of humanism. Here individual mind is never put down by slenderness or vain glory. The ills of the society are often prompted by our so-called knowledge and wisdom, health and wealth, power and progress. A certain sense of inwardness of vision for the well being of the society ought to be the fundamental end-in-view of our little bit of endeavour for the advancement of humanism. Each and everyone in the society is the warmth of sincerity of purpose where every form of involvement is surcharged with a spirit of evolution of consciousness for advancement of humanism. The fusion of society and humanism always demands every individual to be hardworking, persuasive, sincere and dutiful. As soon as every member of the society is interested not in himself but for others, society becomes vibrant with the spirit of humanism. This is what Swami Vivekananda earnestly appeals to make regeneration of humanity. As a practical humanist, Vivekananda remarks, “Analysing the ethical laws of the world and comparing them with the actual state of things, two laws stand out supreme. The one, that of repelling everything from us- separating ourselves from everyone-which leads to self-aggrandisement

even at the cost of everyone else's happiness. The other, that of self-sacrifice-of taking no thought of ourselves-only of others. Both spring from the search for happiness-one, of finding, happiness in injuring others and the ability of feeling that happiness only in our own senses, The other, of finding happiness in doing good to others-the ability of feeling happy, as it were through the senses of others. The great and the good of the world are those who have the latter power predominantly. Yet both these are working side by side conjointly; in almost everyone they are found in mixture, one or the other predominating.”⁷⁶

Humanism and Religion

According to Vivekananda, religion and humanism are unparallel as he identifies religion as the ‘soul of humanity’. Vivekananda never considers humanism apart from religion and vice-versa. For him the efflorescence of religion always depends on how it best serves human under all trying circumstances. Unlike many other humanists, Vivekananda is more interested in making religion a very comprehensive and essential component of growth and development of humanity. Religion is fundamental in the very soul of humanity because all life is the evolution of that which is within it. The language of the soul is one, the language of nations are many. Religion is the soul and finds expression through various nations, languages and customs. According to Vivekananda, to learn religion in terms of humanity is to learn the spirit inherent in it. It must enter deep into the heart of hearts. Religion, therefore, is a continual enquiry into the heartland of humanity. This enquiry is complex and difficult because it is a

⁷⁶ Ibid. p.452.

challenge to discover and rediscover oneself in terms of purity and perseverance. Vivekananda gives utmost importance on the purity of the soul which in turn allows religion to be pursued in terms of humanity. Vivekananda says, “The conditions necessary in the thought are purity, a real thirst after knowledge, and perseverance. No impure soul can be religious; this is the one great condition; purity in every way is absolutely necessary.”⁷⁷

However, to want religion is very difficult thing, not so easy as we generally think. Religion does not consist in hearing talks, or in reading books but it is a continuous struggle, a grappling with our own nature, a continuous fight till the victory is achieved. It is not a question of one or two days, of years, or of lives, but it may be hundreds of lifetimes. One must be ready for that. According to Vivekananda, turning to religion is an indispensable spirit of advancement of humanity. Vivekananda makes known religion from four dimensions, namely, it must be a matter of the soul of man; it must cater the efflorescence of humanism; it is a spirit both evolutionary and revolutionary in the service of self-ascent and self-excellence; and it must be solemnised with the spirit of altruism. Indeed the spirit of humanism always backs a study of the conceptual components to religious scriptures. In this regard, Vivekananda assets on a scientific and objective approach to each conceptual component which will definitely eliminate all sense of ambiguity and misunderstanding arising out of purely subjective approach to religion. Even though Vivekananda searches universal religion, i.e. the religion of all religions, but he was very much aware of different

⁷⁷ Ibid. p.46.

conceptual patterns of religious thoughts. For Vivekananda, any religious study needs to be identified in terms of its typical hints and suggestions and also in terms of comparison and contrast with other conceptual patterns. This process of identification is not an ending process; rather it is a continuous process through which one can arrive at a conclusion which highlights the spirit of religion in the right perspective of ascent and excellence. Analysis of manifold of religion actually helps one to encounter in one's pursuit of religion, one's deep and sustained involvement in every item of religious experience. Therefore, the study of religion becomes comprehensive, all-embracing which will help the religious man to visualise his unique contribution to advancement of human growth and relationship.

Vivekananda regards religion as an essential and integral element of human progress from various perspectives. Religion, for Vivekananda, is an integral part of human life because it is the only means through which one can develop and enrich the essence of humanism. As a rational being, man is striving for ascent and excellence. Essentially religion belongs to the super-sensuous and not to the sense plane. It is beyond all reasoning; it is not the part of the sphere of intellect. Religion, for Vivekananda, is a vision, an inspiration, a thrust into the unknown and unknowable, making the unknowable more than known. Religion is an never-ending exploration of the unknowable in the human mind. It is a continuous process of transcending from the narrower self to the greater Self, which can be measured in terms of degree. Vivekananda in this regard says,

"The macrocosm and the microcosm are, as it were, in the same groove, passing through the same stages, vibrating in the same key."⁷⁸

Even though Vivekananda was talking about spiritual religion based humanism, but from this it does not follow that his understanding of humanism is a full of mysticism. Rather Vivekananda looks upon humanism as a living and dynamic process of human growth and development. He cares the most for the neglected and distressed humanity more than rites and scriptures of religion because he feels in the heart of hearts that true humanistic religion always portraits the neglected and the depressed, the lowly and the lost. He feels it very well that so long the sorrows and sufferings of the mankind are diligently and honourably not negotiated, so long the narrowness of religion has not been extinguished; religion loses all its inner worth and would be fruitless for the development of humanism in general. However, Vivekananda understands religion in terms of humanity. Therefore, everyone must know and practice religion that cares for and promotes the divinity inherent in every one of us. Vivekananda therefore, categorically identifies religions and accordingly practices religion in terms of humanity and by doing so he pays more importance to the real happenings of the day to day life which enables everyone of us to know and practice religion that cares for and promotes the divinity inherent in everyone of us. It is really an astonishing matter that Vivekananda categorically identifies the inherent relation between God and man in religion. In this regard, Vivekananda says that we are

⁷⁸ Ibid. p.203.

servant of the Lord. He says, "I believe in God, and I believe in man. I believe in helping the miserable. I believe in going even to hell to save others."⁷⁹

Religion comes closest to humanity because a religious sentiment is such where if one man is against me, a hundred hands are ready to help me; here, where man feels for man, weeps for his fellow man and women are goddesses. Religion acts as a means of humanism by eliminating all kinds of evils, narrowness and superstition. Religion, for Vivekananda, is the vital force for awakening of man. Man can be religious in order to develop humanism for the best interest of mankind. Humanism in the perfect manner can best be awakened if religion distinctly unfolds the vision of the good of mankind in the efflorescence of inherent divinity and love. Religion demands self-sacrifice on the part of religious man. The inseparability of religion and humanism then will certainly become an instinctive and natural endeavour, which will certainly assure a new dawn of consciousness of humanity. While writing a letter to Miss Noble Vivekananda characteristically says, ⁸⁰"One idea that I see clear as daylight is that misery is caused by ignorance and nothing else. Who will give the world light? Sacrifice in the past has been the Law; it will be, alas, for ages to come. The earth's bravest and best will have to sacrifice themselves for the good of the many, for the welfare of all. Buddhas by the hundred are necessary with eternal love and pity." Vivekananda further claims that religions of the world have become lifeless mockeries. The world is in need of those whose life is one burning love, selfish; the love that will make every word like thunderbolt. Bold

⁷⁹ Ibid. p.501.

⁸⁰ Ibid. p.501.

words and bolder deeds are what we want. As the world is burning with miseries, it is the high time to awake, awake great ones. He who is humanist must be a religious man beforehand. As a humanist par excellence, he always defines and explores religion in the heart-beat of every human being and always emphasises on sincerely understanding and appreciating religion in terms of man, the Divine Being. His heart aches for the poor and the distressed, the lowly and the lost because he is in a perfect position to realise that every Divine Being inherent in every one of them is despised and neglected. Thus, as an ardent proponent of a practical and living humanist, Vivekananda brings religion closest to humans. He says, “Let each of us pray day and night for the down-trodden millions of India who are held fast by poverty, priest craft and tyranny-pray day and night for them. I care more to preach religion to them than to the high and the rich. I am no metaphysician, no philosopher, nay, no saint. But I am poor; I love the poor....Who feels for them? They cannot find light or education. Who will bring the light to them-who will travel from door to door bringing education to them? Let these people be your God-think for them, work for them, pray for them incessantly- the Lord will show you the way.”⁸¹

It seems clear to us that Vivekananda advocates a kind of humanism which actually touches the steam of life of every human what he terms as the Divinity of the soul. He, in fact, wants to bring religion closest to the heartland of every human so that it becomes the most vibrant and endearing factor of human ascent and excellence. His simplistic slogan in this regard is: ‘Be and make’. He always

⁸¹ Ibid. p.57.

reminds it in us; he always reminds us the inherent spirit inherent in every human being. He emphasises more on evolution of intellectuality of spirit to respect the inherent divinity in everyone irrespective of caste, creed, religion, a sinner or a saint rather than involution. His most fundamental religious slogan is: let us make our land on the one central truth, the spirit of man, the Atman of man, the immortal, birthless, all pervading, eternal soul of man. Even though every individual has its own name, but the only difference among all is not in terms of kind, but in degree. He says, let us be Gods, and then help others to be Gods ('Be and Make'). Let us adopt this as our motto. Never say a man a sinner as he is a God, he is part of our body. Everything is the will of God. So recognise and realise everything as the part of God.

Vivekananda does not have any faith on compartmentalised religion; his religion is the religion of all religions. His religion hinges on the common heritage of all religions, like the Hindus, Buddhists, and Jains alike. He keeps the doors of all religions to be studied and shared in a harmonious and disciplined manner so that every religion finds the right atmosphere of efflorescence in human and enlightened sensibilities. There is no point of claiming that one religion should get the upper hand over the other. As an invaluable exponent of advancement of humanism, Vivekananda always searches religion as the essential and integral components human sensibilities like love, sympathy, cordiality, and the like. For Vivekananda, true religion is always a synthesis of all religion where every religion is looked upon as a great contributor to the cause of human development. Thus Vivekananda gives utmost importance on the oneness of

religion as the essence of religion and thereby draws out attention to the essentials and values of all religions caring for the good of mankind. Thus, religion in its true sense is not the outcome of the weakness of human nature; rather religion is love, a means of growing in a never ending process where we notice a continuous motion. Motion, for Vivekananda, is life. As an ardent follower of *Srimadbhagvad Gita*, Vivekananda espouses the *pregnant truth of religion* based on self-sacrifice. Renunciation in terms of exercise of humanity is what he earnestly considers to be man's forte in following religion. Renunciation is made possible by highlighting humanism in the best possible means of religion. The man of renunciation can see all with an equal eye and devotes himself to the service of all. Vivekananda emphasises actual and immediate insolvent in the well-being of others irrespective of caste, creed or religion they belong to. He never allows any religion to be accepted as religion unless that religion is concerned with the cause of human welfare. He thus allows no room for belief in religion; instead of this, he identifies and honours every religion in its involvement in one's being and becoming. In this way one can find the way of self-identity, self-analyses and self-assertion which will never allow any blind faith to creep in one's mind. Blindness towards religion actually affects harbouring of humanism. As Vivekananda searches an oneness of God and man, his religion actually highlights the glory of both being merged in the spirit of the ever-illumined One. As a practical and living humanist, Vivekananda allows creativity, critical thinking and unending stream of curiosity and askance as the most reliable and effective guidelines to one's advancement of religious

sensibilities. When somebody discovered that “I and my father are one”, the last word was said of religion. In true religion there is no faith in the sense of blind faith. To believe blindly is to degenerate the human soul. Vivekananda advises his disciples to ‘stand up and reason out’, where there remains no blind faith. Religion, for Vivekananda, *is a question of being and becoming*, not of believing. This is the true message of religion and you would be the true messenger of religion if you are abided by this true message. Otherwise, a man is not better than an animal.

In a nutshell, it can be said humanism and religion of Vivekananda are two sides of the same coin. There is no difference between God and religion and the true vision of man is made possible through the manifestation of God in man. Vivekananda then concludes by saying that all goodness to humanity is a religious affair and unless this truth of religion and humanism well embedded together and applied in day to day affairs of life, then both humanism and religion will suffer. Therefore, one must love God for love’s sake, not for the hope of reward; we must do our duty for duty’s sake, not for the hope for reward. This was the message of Kant as well. We must worship the beautiful for beauty’s sake, not for the hope of reward. This should be the religious approach and must adhere to it for having divine perfection. Thus, to a humanist, religion is a part and parcel of life and this is what Swami Vivekananda tries to establish in his philosophy of religion and humanism.

Humanism and Aesthetic

Aesthetic is an intimate part of religion and ethics. Therefore, as a humanist, Vivekananda does not rule out the relevance of aesthetic in his humanism. According to Vivekananda, the world of aesthetics is the world of Truth, Goodness and Beauty. Truth, Beauty and Goodness altogether is the essence of humanism, i.e. the excellence of humanism, the greatest creation of the All Serene. Vivekananda makes a natural and harmonious unification between aesthetics and humanism so much so that the spirit of humanism is all the time crystallised in aesthetic sensibilities. In fact, aesthetic occupies core part of humanism and aesthetic is a dynamic and practical efflorescence of humanism. One's continuous and devoted endeavour of aestheticism actually paves the right path of humanism. Unification of aesthetic and humanism actually leads an end-in-view of fullness of man the Divine. Truth as an aesthetic component serves as a continual source of guidance to excellence and ascent. Realisation of truth is the realisation of true religion. We have already outlined the relevance of religion after Vivekananda and have seen in what sense humanism is an integral part of religion. Now we can say after Vivekananda that religion is the most dependable vehicle of Truth and Truth as an aesthetic component makes religion most thrilling and acceptable in every walk of life. Moreover, even though there are different types of religions in names, but their objective remains the same and in this sense all religions are unified themselves by embodying and disseminating truth. According to Vivekananda, every religion has a soul behind it and that one soul may differ from the soul of other religion. Are they

contradictory? According to Vivekananda, they are not contradictory, but supplementary because each religion takes up one part of the great universal truth. Man never progresses from error to truth but from truth to truth, from lesser truth to higher truth, but never from error to truth.

Thus, in one sense, it can be said that Vivekananda envisages humanistic aesthetics. Humanistic aesthetic is a form of ‘inner light, i.e. light within itself which never allows the interest of the self above that of the greater selves of others who are all representing the All Serene. Self-sacrifice is all about of aesthetic humanism. Self-sacrifice is made possible through self-realisation, a constant cultivation of one own self which eventually paves the way or path of broadening one’s own outlook or vision towards others. It helps one top prepare how to serve every human being to the best of one’s abilities. Vivekananda advises us that to attain liberation through work, just join yourselves to work without desire, without result. Such works leads to knowledge, which in turns brings emancipation. Do all as a sacrifice to the Lord; let your love go to all. A blind man cannot see colour, so how can we see evil unless it is in us. If we are pure, we cannot see impurity. It may exist, but not for us. See only God in every man, woman and child. See it through ‘inner light’. See Lord and the Lord only. Seek the science of the maker and not that of the made.⁸²

Vivekananda was against any blind dogma. Truth and goodness are the key themes to Vivekananda’s philosophy of aesthetic in humanism. According to Vivekananda, truth is related to the well-being of humanity, the goodness, the

⁸² Ibid. p.63-64.

beauty of truth is always the outcome of goodness that embellishes every thought and action, contemplation and perfection. Just like Kantian kingdom of ends, Vivekananda equally envisages of the realisation of the presence of the Kingdom of God as an end of glorious humanistic endeavour. Vivekananda further contends that the religion of humanism is practically the religion of aesthetics. It is that humanism which constantly illuminates the spirit of aesthetic goodness by debarring all sorts of injury and maladies. Seeing God in man and loving man as the embodiment of All Love is the fundamental components of human ascent and excellence. Thus, the aesthetic of humanism of Vivekananda actually promotes the spirit of love that makes man endear man. This is the religion of man that glorifies the Divinity inherent in every man. Vivekananda calls a man ‘religious’ from the day when he began to see God in men and women. When you see man as God everything will be welcome because in such a stage everything comes to you as Lord, as eternal, as the Blessed One in various forms. They are our own soul playing with us. Thus, it seems clear that human relationship can make us divine because our relationship with God may take any of these forms and we can look upon Him as our father, or mother, or friend, or beloved. For Vivekananda, calling God Mother is a higher ideal than calling Him Father; and to call Him Friend is still higher; but the highest is to regard Him as the Beloved. In the highest stage, there is no difference between lover and loved. Every man and woman, Vivekananda opines, is the palpable, blissful, living God. We have found God eternally; we have been living in Him eternally; everywhere he is eternally known, eternally worshipped. Thus, to

know God is to know truth and knowing truth is to be in close association with human kind. Man is remained undiscovered so long truth is discovered. When he speaks of oneness of man and God, he thereby makes a bridge between man and God through truth. According to Vivekananda, the concept of Atman, i.e. the eternal light of the Self is impossible unless it is based on truth and thereby proclaims the vision of man in divine. All truth or knowledge leads to One Existence, One Soul. Therefore, entering into the world of truth- the truth of loving others and living in identity with God is the genesis of eternal humanist.

According to Vivekananda, truth or true knowledge vanquishes all sorts of darkness. Here every individual is freed from selfishness or self-assertion and devotes to the progress of truth that paves path to the welfare of others. Vivekananda calls for killing out differentiation and superstition. He says, “He who in this world of many sees that One, he who in this mass of insentienty sees that one Sentient Being, he who in this world of shadows catches that Reality unto him belongs eternal peace, unto none else, unto none else.”⁸³ Do well for others. Every great man preached the brotherhood of mankind. Injure none; take man where he stands, lead him a helping hand and put him on a higher platform. In this way, all will come truth in the long run. Vivekananda says, “When all the desires of the heart will be vanquished, this very mortal will become immortal”⁸⁴ In this way the very man will become God.

⁸³ Ibid. p.4.

⁸⁴ Ibid. p.235.

The aesthetic of love is another important dimension of Vivekananda's humanism. When he speaks of the living God, he reminds us of the fact that God is man. Vivekananda illustrates the great aesthetic vision of the unison between man and God by illuminating illustration. Two birds sat on the tree. The bird at the top was calm, majestic, beautiful and perfect. The lower bird was always hopping from twig to twig, now eating sweet fruits and being happy, now eating bitter fruits and being miserable. One day when he had eaten a fruit more bitter than usual, he glanced up at the calm, majestic upper bird and thought, "How I would like to be like him" and hopped up a little way towards him. Soon he forgot all about his desire to be like the upper bird, and went on as before, eating sweet and bitter fruits and being happy and miserable. Man is like that lower bird but if he perseveres in his efforts to rise to the highest ideal he can conceive of, he too will find that he was the self all the time and the other was but a dream. According to Vivekananda, the unison between the little self and the Divine self within oneself is the making perfection already within oneself. According to Vivekananda, the religion of man is to find out the inherent beauty of man that always adorns goodness. It makes man really a man. Good and bad are relative terms as what is good to one is bad for other. Everything is God. He is the good; He is the evil; He is the beautiful; He is the terrible; He is life; he is death. The quest for perfection is to find out the essence of humanism. It is a kind of quest that does not allow one to welcome evil and banish good but crystallises all evil sensibilities with the best and the noblest spirit of humane enlightenment. Vivekananda draws our attention to stick to aesthetic refinement

of sensibilities in all our actions as he realises that the spirit of humanism gets an added and desirable spurt to visualise the All Beautiful in everyone in our quest for perfection. We are to take care of ourselves by giving attention to others. The world can be good and pure, only if our lives are good and pure. We are the means, so let us purify ourselves.⁸⁵

Vivekananda envisages all round purity in thought and action which eventually paves the way of human excellence and ascent. Purity, for Vivekananda, is the most essential end-in-view of humane development. Purity leads to perfection by disallowing evil thoughts. To refine all good and evil thoughts is to be justified to the self as well as to humanity. Moreover, the path of purity and love is not merely a path of aesthetic exercise but it is essentially one of fullness of man. The greatest purity is what breaks upon the world as a movement of social reform. Every thought, every action and every humane endeavour is to be in perfect tune with the great aesthetic spirit of Vivekananda's philosophy of humanism. When purity and morality are devoted together in the spirit of aesthetic fitness, the identity of man as a champion of human sensibilities manifests in the best possible manner. Purity and morality has been always the object of religion; a pure moral man has control of himself. All minds are the same, different parts of one Mind. Accordingly, he who knows one lump of clay has known all the clay of the universe. He who knows and controls his own mind knows the secret of every mind and has power over every mind. Thus, it can be said that the identification of humanism in terms of aesthetics as Vivekananda

⁸⁵ Ibid. Vol. II, P.9.

envisioned actually refers to our knowledge of the Atman which is an embodiment of all aesthetic and humanised visions. The spirit of renunciation which truly represents the religion of man is one which steers us towards unison with the All Good. Devotion, for Vivekananda, to the aesthetic component of renunciation becomes a part and parcel of one's very being and it can alone have a true vision of the co-existence of God and man in all aesthetic grandeur. That is why, while analysing the true concept of God in terms of man, Vivekananda stresses on the aesthetic spirit of renunciation to be followed and practiced by everyone till the encounters the vision of All Good in every human being. According to Vivekananda, the only true knowledge is the knowledge of Atman. This is the only work to call upon mankind to. It is renunciation; true religion is nothing but *Tyaga*, i.e. self-sacrifice. Therefore, Vivekananda advises us, "Awake, arise and stop not till the goal is reached."⁸⁶

Thus, it seems that the concept of religion in terms of the aesthetics of humanism opens up a new vista of human ascent and excellence. His concept of religion is best suited to the finer and nobler vision of man where love and sacrifice, goodness and welfare of all eliminate the trivial self-interest of health, wealth, happiness and so on. There are so many religion based on self-interest and Vivekananda has termed such religion as 'shop keeping religion' which actually smudges the aesthetic vision as well as mission of the religion of man. Every religion has prayers, but one thing you must bear in mind-praying for health or wealth is not *Bhakti*.

⁸⁶Ibid. Vol.III, P.385.