

Perspectives on Humanism: Swami Vivekananda and Deendayal Upadhyaya (Comparative study)

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Abstract

'Humanism' underlines the centrality of human agency. It offers a philosophical and ethical perspective against which individual and society are viewed. It came as a revolt against religious authoritarianism, prevailing dogmas and asserted the freedom of man and encouraged critical thinking, leaving no room for the 'transcendental' or 'mystical'. True to his Vedantic conviction he considered 'man' as the highest manifestation of divinity on Earth. As everyman is potentially divine one deserves fair opportunities to grow into perfection. He was critical of the traditional dogmas, social discriminations and poverty of the mass. He was in favor of the synthesis of the East and West and encouraged 'Education' as the potent means as it promotes awareness among the people. He articulated the idea of 'universal religion' because for him cardinal values constitute the secular core of the 'sacred' and envisioned a society without distinction and dogma, where the Vedantic ideals are translated into day today living. Deendayal Upadhyaya, a philosopher sociologist, economist and politician in one, articulated a socio-economic model in which human beings remain at the centre of development. He was in favor of a sustainable consumption of natural resources such that the resources can be replenished and diversity can be preserved. He was critical of both Capitalism and Communism because both make room for individualism and consider the body and mind to be the only realities. He envisages a classless, casteless social system based on the cardinal values such as *Dharma, Artha, Kama, Moksa*. He was a strong advocate of the view that an ideal society and political system can be in place when it is based on *dharma*. *Dharma* for him is a sustaining principle of the society and universe. The highest good of man consists in living for the wellbeing of others (*lokasamgraha*). Different religions have shared objectives, irrespective of the way they pursue different paths leading to the highest goal.

Keywords: *Sacred, Secular, Capitalism, Socialism, Liberty, Equality, Rta, Dharma, Artha, Kama, Moksa, Lokasamgraha.*

The term 'humanism' entered into socio-political discourse during 16th century Renaissance. One comes across distinct ontology, epistemology and ethics in humanistic framework. Ontologically, humanism construes 'man' as the centre of the reality. It seeks to explain human growth and development in terms of man's creative choice and participation. It maintains that since the Universe is explainable in terms of the natural laws there is no necessity of postulating the 'transcendental' or 'non-empirical' to explain the phenomenal universe. For a humanist, existence

of man is central to everything that takes place in the name of progress or development. The naturalistic ontology leaves no room for myths, make-beliefs, dogmas and superstitions. It takes 'experience' and 'reason' as the sole factors that determine the domain of 'knowledge'. Things that are not supported by experience or reason are to be brushed aside as unwarranted suppositions. Even the existence of 'mind' and 'soul' is explained in terms of the functions of the body. It questions the autonomy of 'mind' and 'soul' over the 'body'. Since man is the architect of his own destiny there is no place for fatalism or destiny. In the domain of ethics one's moral obligation or duty depends on the extent to which it promotes the cause of individual and social wellbeing.

Spiritual Humanism:-

Vivekananda was a Vedantin in thought, word and practice. Man occupies the centre stage in his Philosophy. Imbued with the Vedantic perception of unity he considered 'man' as the highest manifestation of divinity on Earth. Since every man is potentially divine there is no place for artificial division of society in the name of caste, color, creed or religion. Given fair opportunity, everyone can grow into perfection. The highest duty of man consists in living for others. He was in favor of liberation of masses and proclaimed that he would prefer to forego his liberation until there is liberation of one and all. The so-called politics is of no avail unless and until it addresses the misery of the masses. He envisioned an ideal society where people at large, are educated, get the minimal necessities of life and the fair opportunity to grow. For him a true Vedantin is one who has the heart to feel the misery and thereby, possess the empathetic concern to love and serve others, the brain to conceive so that there is no room for dogma and superstitions and hand to work so that the Vedantic ideal of 'love and serve' becomes a living reality.

*We need to have three things in life the heart to
Feel, the brain to conceive and the hand to work,
Make yourself a dynamo.¹*

¹ *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda* (CWS), Vol-VI, 7th ed., 1963, P- 144-45

Universal Religion: -

He was at great pain to find that there was so much of discrimination, mutual intolerance in the name of religion. For him the bedrock of every religion are the cardinal values such as love, serve, tolerance, forgiveness, sacrifice which are secular in nature and constitute the essence of every religion. For him objective of true religion or religious practice is to provide conditions for expression of potential divinity in man.

Religion is the manifestation of divinity already in man.²

Religions are bound to be many as they arise in response to man's desire to grow from imperfection to perfection. Plurality of religions is inevitable because they show different ways of cultivating the cardinal values. But there is a commonality in respect of which all religions can share a common platform.

The gist of all worship is to be pure and to do good to others. He who sees Shiva in the poor, in the weak, and in the diseased, really worships Shiva; and if he sees Shiva only in the image, his worship is but preliminary.³

That is why he floated the idea of 'Universal religion' and one universal society. There is no scope for fanaticism. He laid emphasis on synthesis of the East and West. The humanity can grow only when they imbibe the 'rational temper' of the West and 'spiritual illumination' of the East. He accorded primacy to eradication of poverty because he was convinced that one cannot meditate or undertake the pursuit of values in empty stomach. He was critical of the faulty economic system which helps the minority to prosper at the cost of the majority. Vivekananda, the Neo-vedantin, brought the lofty ideals of Vedanta to the realities of social life and underlined that *Vedanta* is not to be studied in classrooms only nor be discussed only in the academic platform. The ideas and ideals of *Vedanta* are to be lived so that the society at large can see a new generation where people embrace each other as the off springs of one God. This leaves no room for selfishness. One should strive utmost to liberate people from the miseries of

² *Ibid*, Vol-IV, P-358.

³ *Complete work of swami Vivekananda (CWC)*, Vol-III, 9th ed., 1964, P. 141-42.

poverty, discrimination and exploitation. Like Buddha he exhorted his fellowmen to go and serve, forgetting whether one is a theist or atheist, agnostic or a Vedantin, Christian or Mohammedian. He was also greatly critical of the dogmas and superstitions which prevent the free flow of mind. That is why he insisted upon the cultivation of 'reason' so that the social evils like dowry, untouchability and social discrimination do not have any place in the social fabric. For him the true religious life consists in living the ideals of Vedanta by considering each man as the manifestation of the '*Brahman*'. This conviction would urge one to share the weal and woe of the fellowmen so that the Vedantic ideal of universal fraternity (*vasudhaiva kutumbakam*) can be a living reality.

Global Brotherhood:-

Vivekananda had great concern for the revival of Indian society and devoted his time and energy for the upliftment of fellowmen. Though he had unflinching love and reverence for motherland his nationalism transcends the confines of the geographical territory, called India. He envisioned global brotherhood based on the Indian ethos. Since every man is divine it can serve as a theoretical foundation or philosophy of life which can bring people of different nations, religions together under one universal banner. Humanism of Vivekananda is not confined to human species only because the Upanisadic worldview that the divinity is omnipresent, the difference in respect of 'matter', 'life', 'mind' and 'spirit' are not of kind but of degree. In this sense, the humanism of Vivekananda goes beyond its narrow limits of safeguarding or addressing the interest of the human species only. Vivekananda envisaged global living where man lives in fellowship with flora and fauna treating everyone as a member of the cosmic family. He accords intrinsic value to every creation, however tiny or big it may be. The global vision of Vivekananda doesn't leave any room for social or national divide, discrimination or exploitation.

Education:-

Vivekananda took 'education' as the fundamental tool and foundational institution to bring about the desirable changes in the human psyche, leading to the formation of ideal society, marked by mutual harmony and peaceful co-existence. He was painfully aware of the fact that though the ancient Indian seers envisioned

a collective living based on the perception of unity beneath diversity Indian society stood divided diversity because of the prevalent superstitions and dogmas, He launched non-compromising crusade against the artificial distinction or discrimination leading to the suffering of the mass. According to him it is only by 'education' that people can be made aware of their duties and responsibilities for one another. Besides, he was aware of the gender divide whereby the women are looked upon as the secondary citizens. The only way to liberate women from centuries of servitude is to awaken them through proper education. He was not in favor of formal education or alphabetical education which is by and large knowledge-centric or information-centric. Real education ought to be value-centric. Values need to be integrated into the knowledge system so that we can ensure a future society where people are not only efficient but morally elevated. He was aware of the dichotomy between East and West. He insisted that the knowledge of the West has to be integrated with the wisdom of the East so that a holistic development can be ensured in the individual as well as the collective body.

Integral Humanism:-

Deendayal Upadhyaya was a Philosopher, Economist, Sociologist and Statesman in one. Having been inspired by the Vedantic ideals, he articulated a holistic socio-economic model, in which human beings remain at the hub of development. The phenomenal universe is the expression of Supreme consciousness, *Brahman*. This forms the foundation of the ethics of 'live and let live' He insisted upon the balancing of the needs of individuals and society. The cause of the society can be best addressed only when individuals are self conscious and tread the path of righteousness (*dharma*). He advocated the supremacy of *dharma*. For him *dharma* does not mean mechanical performance of rituals but the practice of the fundamental values. Peaceful and harmonious society can be ensured only when the individual as well as collective life is regulated by *dharma*. Life becomes worth living only when it is regulated by the cardinal values. Liberation (*moksa*), the supreme goal of life, is possible only when people, at large, are liberated from the bondages of body and mind. He was critical of Capitalism which thrives on the 'instinct to accumulate' and the motivation to amass more and more, irrespective of the plight of the majority. In the long run it promotes 'individualism.

He was equally critical of 'Communism' because in the name of social or collective good individual interest is ignored. He proposes the ideal of 'Integral Humanism' whereof the matter-centric ideology of Communism and the self-centric ideology of Capitalism are overcome. The political system should be based on *dharma* or the fundamental values. *Dharma* is not synonymous with 'religion'. It stands for the primordial principles that sustain the society and the Universe. So, the notion of *dharma* in his framework has the distinct Vedantic echo. In the Upanishads *dharma* is equated with *Rta*, the cosmic order. Like Vivekananda he asserted that true religion is secular at the core, based on the fundamental values. *Dharma* is one whereas religions are many. When people mistake the superficialities of religion to be the essence of religion it leads to religious conflicts and social divides. Social engineering should be tempered by values and promotion of the collective wellbeing (*lokasamgraha*). He reinterprets secularism as religious tolerance, rather than as religious neutrality. He was pragmatically aware of the fact that the Nature has enough for the sustainability of human life. But when 'greed' takes precedence over 'need' it results in the abuse and dearth of natural resources. So, he was in favor of the sustainable consumption of natural sources such that resources can be regenerated and preserved. Diversity is the law of nature. There should be all out effort to preserve the diversity. In keeping with the Vedantic vision he reiterates that things and beings, small or big, are bound by an underlying chord showing the interrelatedness and interdependence. This truth should be upper most in the minds of the politicians, social scientists, educationists and religious followers so that one human society based on the cardinal values can be ushered in.

'Man' is not merely, a body or a soul but a body- mind-spirit complex. Those who consider body to be paramount, take to the accumulation wealth and construe maximization of 'physical pleasure' to be the sole motivation behind individual and collective endeavor. On the contrary, those who acknowledge the reality of spirit undermining the importance of body go to the other extreme paying scant attention to 'physicality'. He appears as a robust realist when he argues in line of Gandhi that one cannot undertake spiritual pursuits in empty stomach. 'Physicality' must be supportive of intellectual and spiritual progress. That is why he insisted upon the holistic progress of body, mind and the spirit. The educational

system, social engineering should be such that there is harmonious and optimal progress of body, mind and spirit. Since individual occupies the center stage of development all out efforts should be in place to enrich the life of individuals leading to the eventual progress of the human society.

Socio- Economic Paradigm:-

Deendayal opined that a proper socio-economic paradigm is central to the all round progress of a society. He was critical of the socio economic paradigms of the West which are predominantly matter-centric and driven by consumerist mindset. In these frameworks Man is considered as the 'end' and resources in the state of nature, i.e., flora, fauna, are looked upon as the means, subservient to the interests of man. Such myopic view is oblivious of the intrinsic value of things and beings and the truth that the universe is an organic whole wherein each is intimately connected and dependent on the rest.

The modern western culture is mainly materialistic and hedonistic. So, they think that man being the highest animal, all the world is intended for his pleasures and man must conquer nature and use it in his service. Bharatiya culture also recognizes the importance of nature in the life and its evolution. It eschews war against and exploitation of nature. Nature must be wooed and not bled.⁴

The developmental blue prints in the western society are driven by the notions of Nationalism, Democracy, Socialism and unity. He argues that 'nationalism' is not compatible with the concept of unity or collective co-existence. 'Nationalism' can unite citizens on the strength of national sentiments, leading to the formation of nation but then, the ideal of 'global unity' would remain an unattainable ideal or utopia. Besides, he spells out the inherent anomalies in Democracy and Socialism. Democracy stands for 'equality' and 'liberty'. In

⁴Upadhyaya Deendayal, *Bharatiya Arthaniti: Vikaskee ek Disha*, Chap-2.P.16: Dharma Pustak Prakash Nene V.V, *Pandit Deendayal Upadhyaya, Ideology and Perception*, Trans- Paranjape M.K, Kulkarni, P. 79. Suruchi Prakashan,1988, New Delhi.

economic domain it gives rise to the principle of non-interference (*laissez faire*) leading to polarization of rich and poor. Minority stands exploited by the majority. In socialistic framework individual liberty is relegated to the background because the social or collective interests get priority over individual interest. As a result, freedom and dignity of individual becomes the casualty. So, socialism and democracy cannot go together. He was equally critical of the Marxist model of socio-economic development which emerged in reaction to capitalistic exploitation. Hypothetically, in the event of resolution of class-conflicts there would be nothing to resolve the contradictions arising from human psyche. Man does not live by bread alone. When the basic necessities are addressed contradictions in the name of language, community and religion may crop up dividing the collective body or society into groups and factions. Deendayal proposed a socio-economic paradigm which gets its rationale from indigenous culture. The cultural ethos should form the bedrock of the socio-economic ideas and ideals. He proposed that Indian ethos can form secure foundation of holistic development as it conceives human society as group of individual who despite their apparent differences, share identity at the core. Since every individual is looked upon as a creation of the divine everyone is potentially divine and infinite. Such perception by people at large, can only make room for the creed of 'live and let live' where each member of the society is considered as offspring of the divine and integral part of the totality. Since everyone has come from singular source and heading towards a common destination, living through different part-lives (*khanda jivan*) people across time and clime are to be seen as co-travelers on the path to a common destination.

Man and Society:-

Deendayal does not visualize incompatibility between individual interest and collective interest because man is a social being by nature and necessity. He was greatly influenced by the ideal of *Lokasamgraha* in the *Bhagvat Gita*. When one works for the collective wellbeing the individual good is taken care of. He subscribes to organic view of society where each individual is looked upon as pivotal in bringing about collective harmony. The problem of an individual becomes the problem of the collective body. Cultural ethos ought to constitute the

basis of society-building. He is aware of the fact that every individual possesses elements of 'good' and 'evil'. If 'anger' and 'greed' point to the animalistic urges in man and 'love' and 'sacrifice' represent the core identity of man. There has to be concerted effort to arouse and nurture the nobility inherent in man so that the social living can be regulated by 'values'. 'Values' constitute the cementing factor to resolve conflicts arising out of superficial differences. This would goad people to embrace the life of co-operation and co-existence. Conflicts are not indicative of culture but are unmistakable pointers to social decadence. Herein, lies the role of values which underline the fact that though we are apparently different we are one in respect of our essence. The seminal values like Love, compassion, sacrifice and mutuality form the very tone and tenor of the social relationships. Imbued by the Vedantic ideals, he argued at length to substantiate the thesis of collective living marked by the principle of 'share and care'.

Value Paradigm:-

Deendayal was vocal in making advocacy in favour of the primacy of values in individual and collective life. He dwells at length on the fourfold schemata of values i.e. *Dharma, Artha, Kama* and *Moksa*, *Kama* refers to the desires and necessities pertaining to practical life. *Artha* refers to the means by which they can be addressed. He takes *Artha* in the broader sense of term, referring to the political and economic systems which evolve the mechanisms for fulfillment of the physical or the material needs. So, he is critical of the system that promotes unrestricted pursuit of material means leading to greed, unholy competition and exploitation. Neither does he approve the idea of considering *Artha* and *Kama* as secondary rather, he argues that in the individual and social spheres *Artha* has to be pursued according to the principles of righteousness (*dharma*).

Chanakya declares that happiness lies in dharma,

which cannot be sustained without artha

(sukhasya moolam dharmah, Dharmasya moolam arthah).⁵

⁵ Upadhyaya Deendayal, *Bharatiya arthniti: Vikaskee Ek Disha*, Chapt- 2. P.16 Dharma Pustak Prakashan, lucknow. 1958.

Dharma stands for the regulative principle. When *Artha* and *Kama* are regulated by *Dharma* it leads to highest attainment i.e. *Moksa*. Liberation is indicative of the state of highest excellence whereof individual is completely resigned to the wellbeing of the society and holds that socio-economic and political engineering should be driven by cardinal values (*dharma*).

Comparative Analysis:-

Swami Vivekananda and Deendayal Upadhyaya were part of the new renaissance moment in the Indian continent. They were proponents of ‘Spiritual humanism’ and ‘integral humanism’ respectively. It is needless to say that world-view (metaphysics) is central to the understanding of the thought currents of a philosopher. Both thinkers share the seminal Vedantic vision of ‘Oneness amidst difference or Unity beneath the diversity’. Their view-points are distinctly tempered by the Vedantic vision of unity of mankind and creation at large. Vivekananda sought to bring Vedanta from theoretical domains to the realities of societal living. His spiritual activism is triggered by the poverty of the mass, discrimination and distinction in the social economic plain. Deendayal was also pained to see the illicit fallout of the flawed socio-economic system, responsible for disparities in the economic sphere leading to suffering of the mass. Both thinkers were critical of the traditional religions and underlined that true religion does not consist in mechanical observance of rites and rituals but following a value-wedded life. The cardinal values like love, compassion, tolerance, forgiveness, mutuality, service, sacrifice etc constitute the secular core of the ‘sacred’. That is why they accord distinct place to *dharma* which is different from traditional religions. Both were aware that religions come into existence to help people to translate *dharma* in day-to-day life but in course of time, dogmas and superstitions creep into religious practices leading to the contrary results.

The views of Vivekananda on society-building and education were inspired by the Vedantic conviction. That is why he urged people to keep the Vedantic ideals uppermost in mind while preparing the blue print for sociopolitical change and evolving an economic system. He was against the inequitable economic system that leaves scope for exploitation of minority by the majority. Vivekananda was a great

exponent of education as the potent tool for socio-political transformation and the unfailing means to overcome the gender divide between man and woman. He stressed the need for a value-centric education which shall not only help to attain knowledge but to grow into ideal citizens. In this respect he pleaded that we must incorporate all that are best in West. The rationality of the West and intuitive wisdom of East need to be synthesized so as to enable individuals to cultivate holistic living. Optimal expression of the latent divinity should be the aim of education and social engineering.

Deendayal on the other hand, was more and more motivated to spell out a socio-economic paradigm to eradicate the prevalent anomalies in the socio-economic-political system. Vedantic underpinning prompted him to reiterate that the socio-economic -Political planning should be based on *dharma*. *Dharma* stands for the regulative principles that can only help the individuals and collective body to overcome the materialistic bias. He pleaded for integral development of individual through optimal expression of the physical, psychical and spiritual faculties. He emphasized that the socio-economic model has to be broad based on the cultural ethos of India. Culture is the outer expression of the inner spirit. That is why he was critical of the western models of development which are inherently contradictory and insisted that the socio-economic paradigm of a nation should be modeled after the indigenous cultural ethos. He was vocal about the importance and necessity of a socio-economic paradigm that takes into account the intrinsic value of not only human beings but also flora fauna and forces in the state of nature. He was in favor of a sustainable economic model which would help human beings to live in harmony among them and also with nature at large. Though both of them shared the seminal Vedantic vision, Vivekananda was more into personal transformation and liberation of the mass whereas Deendayal was more focused to bring about changes in the socio political-economic domain so that that it paves the way for the integral growth of the physical, psychic and spiritual potentiality. The humanism of Vivekananda was articulated on the strength of the Vedantic vision of oneness with sole motivation to liberate individual and society from different natural and social bindings leading to realization of Godhood whereas Deendayal was more into bringing about changes in the socio-economic environment which

would enable individuals and collective psyche to embrace integral living and holistic growth of one and all.

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