

VIVEKANANDA ON THE GENESIS AND CONTROL OF VIOLENCE

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We know from the Hindu Epics and Mythology that god or goddesses were involved in fight with the Demons. There was no supreme court for the judgment regarding right and wrong. The right or wrong were established by power. The people at that time did not realise that the establishment of right and wrong by power was a sort of violence.

In the Vedic era, the saints were involved in different oblations and they sacrificed goat, horse etc. on the oblation. At that time there was a custom of killing of cows for entertaining distinguished guests. Violence was present in different stages of life. *Rāmāyana*, *Mahābhārata* and other scriptures prescribe different types of violence. In *Mahābhārata* the superiors or the elders like Dronacharya, Vishma, did not raise their voice against violence. The blind king Dhritarastra did not realize the need for preventing the war even after hearing the loathsome form of the war from Bidura. Only one person was against violence who tried to prevent the war and he was Arjuna. But the war of *Kurukshetra* took place and dignity of *Ātman* or Self has been dishonored, but no one preached for non-violence, because the war was regarded as a fight for truth or justice.

Everyone wants to understand the meaning of life. Generally people believe that happiness is the ultimate aim of life and they try to acquire property, money etc. for getting happiness. But some people say that property does not give happiness to man. Because, most of the rich people in the present world suffering from numerous physical and mental problems. On the other hand, the poorest man who has learnt to have pleasure may enjoy their lives far more than the richest people. Dharmananda Kosambi says, "The aim in life varies among individuals. An artist may aim to paint masterpieces that will live long after he is gone. A scientist may want to discover some laws, formulate a new theory, or invent a new machine. A politician may wish to become prime minister or president. A young executive may aim to be a managing director of a multinational company. However, when you ask the artist, scientist, politician and the young executive why they aim such, they will reply that these achievements will give them a purpose in life and make them happy. Everyone aims

for happiness in life, yet experience shows time and again that its attainment is so elusive.”¹ On many occasions our attempt to attain our own happiness engages us in violence at the cost of unhappiness of others.

World report on violence and health (WRVH) defines violence as "The intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment, or deprivation."² The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy records four types of violence as follows:³

1. Physical Violence: physical violence may be directed against persons, animals, or property. In this case the force is used to cause physical harm, death, or destruction.
2. Psychological violence: psychological violence applies principally to persons. This type of violence causes severe mental or emotional harm through humiliation, deprivation, or brainwashing, whether force is used or not.
3. Illegality or illegitimacy violence: this type of violence involves profaning, desecrating, defiling or showing disrespect for something valued, sacred or cherished.
4. Environmental violence: it is extreme physical force in the natural world, as in tornados, hurricanes and earthquakes.

Human being is the highest product of evolution. Only Human beings can understand the true meaning of their life. It accepted that, no human being likes pain or suffering and everybody tries to remove it from life. Most of the time we accuse others for causing our suffering, but rarely we try to understand the real cause of our suffering, and on most occasions we do not want to understand why our sufferings originate. But if we look for a deeper understanding of the origin of our suffering, we shall find that in most of the cases the appropriate place to look for it is our inner life rather than social, cultural, political reality.

¹ Kosambi Dharmananda, *Leading A Buddhist Life, Milemische*, 2011, p.-228-9

² © Copyright World Health Organization (WHO), 2013, Website.

³ Audi R., *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*, Cambridge Univ. Press, 1999, p.-959

People usually believe that virtue, wealth and happiness are good for us. Man searches for happiness everywhere, but they do not really know that happiness is within us, and this is because the lack of self-knowledge. *Upaniṣad* teaches us that *Ātman* is eternal, consciousness and pure bliss. That is why it is said that *Ātman* is *Vijñāna* and *ānanda* -“*vijñānamānandam Brahman.*” Again in *Taitteriya Upaniṣad* it is called *Ānandarupatā*- “*Ānando brahmeti bjañātha.*”⁴ It is also treated as *rasaswarupa*, the people be joyful for getting this *rasaswarupa*. So nobody wants to live in the world if this *rasaswarupa* is absent. *Ātman* is knower and cannot be treated as object. It is self-explanatory, it explains everything but it cannot be explained by anything. It is pure bliss. That is why it is dear to us. Everything is loveable because love is in it.

According to *Advaita Vedānta*, people engage themselves in violence due to lack of self knowledge or ignorance. If we want to remove violence from the world, we have to remove the primal cause of it. First of all we have to remove the ignorance from *Ātman* and consequently reveal the real nature of the self or *Ātman*. Hindu philosophy or religion preaches that liberation is the ultimate aim of man. Vivekananda opines:

There is to be found in every religion the manifestation of this struggle towards freedom. It is the groundwork of all morality, selfishness, which means getting rid of the idea that men are the same as their little body. When we see a man doing good work, helping others, it means that he cannot be confined within the limited circle of “me and mine”. There is no limit to this getting out of selfishness. All the great systems of ethics preach absolute unselfishness as the goal⁵

Vivekananda was the only person in his time who did think that religion was not responsible for the failure to construct science and technology based society, rather, lack of application of highest essence or fundamental truths of religion in our daily life is responsible for that. Indian philosophers always used religion as a way of liberation from bondage. But Vivekananda wanted to use religion for solving our daily life problems. He regarded religion as a tool for changing the economic and social sphere. He traveled India and invented a new India with the conversation with highest aristocrat society to lower level society. He observed that religion was not

⁴ *Taitterio Upanisad*, 2/7

⁵ Vivekananda Swami, *Karma Yoga*, Advaita Ashrama, Kolkata. P.-119

responsible for the distress of Indian people. He claimed that there were so many problems in India such as caste, superstition, social and economic inequality, lack of education, poverty etc. of which we could not apply the highest ideal of Indian scriptures in our practical life.

Swamiji was the first person who asked the question: is religion able to give empirical enrichment? His answer in this regard with sarcastic way that, the religion which is not able to remove widow's tear, which is unable to give a bread to the orphan child- that religion is not believable at all. So long as there is even a dog unfed my religion would be to provide some food to it. That is, according to Vivekananda, a religious person should always be engaged to love the living god who is present around us in various forms of living beings.

Vivekananda's philosophy of action is an outstanding idea regarding socio-economic standpoint. Every action which takes place in this world is the expression of the human desire. Vivekananda's *Karmayoga* is very much relevant to the present society as well as to ethics. According to *Karmayoga*, the action one has done cannot be destroyed until it has borne its fruit. There is no power in nature which can stop it from yielding its results. If one does an immoral action, he must suffer for it, there is no power in this universe to stop or stay it. Similarly if one does a good action, there is no power in the universe which can stop its bearing good results. The cause must have its effect and nothing can prevent or restrain this. Freedom comes through unselfish work and freedom is the goal of all human nature according to *Karmayoga*. Every selfish action, therefore, retards our reaching the goal, and every unselfish action takes us towards the goal and for this reason definition of morality can be given in this way: "That which is selfish is immoral, and that which is unselfish is moral".⁶

The goal of human being is to achieve freedom and this freedom can be attained only by perfect unselfishness, and every thought and deed that is unselfish takes us towards the goal. That is why it is called moral. This idea of morality usually finds a place in every religion as well as in every system of ethics. Swamiji's opinion in this regard *Karmayoga* can help to attain freedom. He says-

⁶ Vivekananda Swami, *Karmayoga*, Advaita Ashrama, Kolkata. P.-120

Karmayoga, is a system of ethics and religion intended to attain freedom through unselfishness and by good works. The *Karmayogi* need not believe in any doctrine whatever. He may not believe even in God, may not ask what his soul is, nor think any metaphysical speculation. He has got his own special aim of realizing selfishness; and he has to work it out himself. Every moment of his life must be realization, because he has to solve by mere work, without the help of doctrine or theory.⁷

According to him, any action which can help to express our internal divinity is treated as the religious action or *karmayoga*. He explains a religious action as the expression of ultimate knowledge and devotion. As every religious action is the expression of internal divinity of man and that is why no religious action can alienate the agent from soul. We can say that a religious action or service is the medium by which we can associate ourselves with God. On the other hand, when a man does any wrong or immoral work, that time the internal divinity is covered and that is why it creates alienation from soul or *Ātman*. This alienation takes place when we detach our mind from the soul. So man does not face any dejection, failure etc. until and unless he is detached from soul or *Ātman*. That is why; we have to keep in mind the above philosophy of action which can give meaning to our life.

We have to mention here that the Sanskrit term *Ātman* and the English term 'soul' are different in meaning. Sometimes the term 'soul' refers to what we call mind. But mind and *Ātman* are not the same entity. *Ātman* acquires different bodies in different births. *Ātman* is infinite and blissful consciousness; no gender can be ascribed to it. It is neither man nor woman.

The Vedāntist does not call it either He or She - these are fictions, delusions of the human brain- there is no sex in the soul. People who are under illusion, who have become like animals, see a woman or a man; living gods do not see men or women. Everyone and everything is the *Ātman*- the self-the sexless, the pure, the ever-blessed.⁸

The *Vedānta* says that the soul is in its nature absolute Existence, absolute Knowledge, and absolute Bliss. These are not qualities of the soul but the essence, According to Vivekananda,⁹ there is no difference between them and the soul and the three are one. We see the one thing in three different aspects. They are beyond all relative knowledge. The eternal knowledge of the self percolating through the brain

⁷ Ibid., P.-121

⁸ *Complete Works*, vol.-II, p.-248-9

⁹ *Ibid.*, p.-460

of man becomes his intuition, reason, and so on. Its manifestation varies according to the medium through which it shines. As soul, there is no difference between man and the lowest animal, only the latter's brain is less developed and the manifestation through it which we call instinct is very dull. On the other hand man's brain is much finer than the lowest animal. Consequently, the manifestation is much clearer, and in the highest man it becomes entirely clear. So with bliss, that which we call love or attraction is the reflection of the eternal bliss of the self. With manifestation comes limitation, but the unmanifested nature of the soul is unlimited bliss. But in love there are some limitations. I love you one day, but I may hate you the next day. My love of one day may decrease the next, because it is a manifestation.

Now the question arises: why does human action be selfish or immoral? We can say that morality exists in human life in different forms. The highest standard of morality means unselfishness for the sake of unselfishness. It considers goodness as a value. It teaches universal love without any distinction of merit, colour, status, etc. In Vivekananda's *Vedānta* philosophy, spirituality leads to the highest morality. When spirituality guides a human action, it becomes free from the evil of the egoism which is the cause of all conflicts. His opinion is that the spirituality generates love which unites mankind into a single society. Spirituality is a reflection of our love towards God. Work that is inspired by love of God is work without desire and when you work without desire you work both for your salvation and for the salvation of the world. According to him only the *Vedānta* Philosophy of ancient India is in a position to give a satisfactory explanation of the principles of morality and reveal its true nature. Application of *Vedānta* may offer a permanent and lasting solution to any kind of violence. He shows that the solutions to all these violence may be derived from ancient *Vedānta* Philosophy. Our ultimate goal of life is to realize ourselves as *Brahman* which is ultimate. *Brahman* is immanent in all beings as the *Ātman* which is man's true self and source of all happiness. But owing to ignorance, we identify ourselves with our body and mind. For this reason we run after bodily pleasures. This is the cause of all evil and suffering. That is why Vivekananda says-

The evils that are in the world are caused by none else but ourselves. We have caused all this evil; and just as we constantly see misery resulting from evil actions, so can we also see that much of the existing misery in the world is the effect of the past wickedness of man. Man alone, therefore, according to this

theory, is responsible. God is not to blame. He, the eternally merciful Father, is not to blame at all. 'we reap what we sow.'¹⁰

So if we remove the ignorance, the *Ātman* reveals its true nature and the individual self realizes that enjoyment of bodily pleasures is not the goal of life. The removal of ignorance and manifestation of inner divinity leading to God realization and this is achieved through *Yoga*.

Vivekananda says that the solution of all these violence is hidden in the Vedāntic thesis of identity between the individual self and *Brahman*. He emphatically says - each individual soul is a part and parcel of that universal soul, which is infinite. Therefore by injuring his neighbor, the individual actually injures himself. This is the basic metaphysical truth underlying all ethical codes. This theory too, is based on the Vedāntic thesis that all individual self (*jivātman*) are identical with *Brahman*. As shown by him unselfishness is an outcome of the realization of identity with the universal soul, while egoism is an outcome of the loss of this identity. In order to eradicate egoism Vivekananda recommended *Karmayoga*, performance of self-loss activities which would ultimately eradicate egoism and bring liberation. These activities as laid down by Vivekananda include socio-political activities.

According to Vivekananda,¹¹ many Indian Philosophical schools have discussed in different ways regarding liberation as well as violence. The dualist sects in India are great vegetarians, great preachers of non-killing of animals. Their idea about it is quite different from that of the Buddhist. If one asks a Buddhist, why do you preach against killing any animal? He will answer, we have no right to take any life, and if one asks a dualist, why do you not kill any animal? He will say, it is the Lord's. So the dualist says that this 'me and mine' is to be applied to God and God alone. He is the only 'me' and everything is His. Again, the qualified non-dualists make the statement that the effect is never different from the cause. The effect is reproduced as a cause in another form. If the universe is the effect and God the cause, it must be God Himself-it cannot be anything but that.

¹⁰ *Complete Works*, vol.-II, p.-242

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p.-245

According to Hindu scriptures, *mokṣa* is far superior to *dharma*. But Vivekananda says¹² *dharma* should be finished first of all. The Buddha were confounded just there and brought about all sorts of mischief. Non-injury is right; ‘Resist not evil’ is a great thing- these are indeed grand principles. But the scriptures say, ‘Thou art a householder, if anyone smites thee on thy cheek, and thou dost not return him an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, thou wilt verily be a sinner’ For Manu, when one has come to kill you, there is no sin in killing him, even though he be a *Brāhmaṇa*. Swamiji’s advice to all his co-religionists that, do not do any wrong, do not injure over anyone. But try to do well to others as much as you can.

If we seriously conceive that do not injure others, we cannot live and every morsel of food we eat is taken from another’s mouth, our very lives are crowding out some other lives. That is why some monks always tried to drink without boiled. “They all knew that if you boiled water these animals were all killed. So these monks, if they died of thirst, they would never kill these animals by drinking water. But if a monk stands at your door and you give him a little boiled water, the sin is on you of killing the animals- and he will get the benefit”¹³

We have to do our works as a duty and it will do for others. Our duty to others means helping others, doing well to the world. Why should we do well to the world? Apparently it seems to help the world, but really to help ourselves. We should always try to help the world, that should be the highest motive in us but if we consider well, we find that the world does not require our help at all. This world was not made that you or I should come and help it. Though Vivekananda’s suggestion is that, we must do well, the desire to do well is the highest motive power we have. If we know all the time that it is a privilege to help others. Do not stand on a high pedestal and take five cents in your hand and say, ‘Here, my poor man’, but be grateful that the poor man is there so that by making a gift to him you are able to help yourself. It is not the receiver that is blessed, but it is the giver. Be thankful that you are aloud to exercise your power of benevolence and mercy in the world, and thus become pure and perfect.

¹² *Complete Works*, vol.-V, p.-448

¹³ *Ibid.*, vol.-III, p.-523

The man whose heart never cherishes even the thought of injury to any one, who rejoices at the prosperity of even his greatest enemy, that man is the *Bhakta*, he is the *Yogi*, he is the *guru* of all, even though he lives every day of his life on the flesh of swine. Therefore we must always remember that external practices have value only as helps to develop internal purity.¹⁴

Finally, we have seen that lack of proper knowledge is the source of all types of violence and the key to the solution of it is hidden in the ancient *Vedānta* philosophy. So, if we regulate our conduct in the spirit of *Vedānta* philosophy, many kinds of violence may be eradicated. So, we have to know our duty and its proper application as explained above otherwise we may invite many dangerous situations in our life resulting in violence and that may percolate in the next generation too.

¹⁴ *Complete Works*, vol.-V, p.-68