

DILEMMAS OF SCIENCE AND RELIGION: SWAMI VIVEKANANDA'S VEDANTIC IDEAS

Dr. Vinay Sophat

Associate Professor, Department of History,
R. K. Arya College, Nawanshahr

Abstract: Narendra nath Datt who is recognised as Swami Vivekananda lived in this mortal world from 1863 to 1902 he contributed immensely in the field of modern Indian philosophy during his lifespan of nearly 40 years he counted the great philosopher office time with his logical capabilities and great intellect is vision was constructive and positive he not only sir the size of philosophical ideas of tourism and monosam but also science and religion he was able to establish the fact that these apparent contradictions are actually complementary to each other he had a deep understanding of different religions as well as modern science in modern idiom and phrases.

Key Words:Sanskaras-sacrament; Darindra-poor; Yogi-practiser of Yoga

India has been a land of multi-cultural and multi socio, economic and religious values. That is why its history has been shaped by many reformers and movements from different perspectives from time to time. It is established fact that society passes through conflicting issues and ideas. These ideas may be ritualistic or ideological. When this conflict grows and becomes inimical to rational existence of the society, to bring the people out of this chaos and confusion, enlightened people usually called as reformers or philosophers emerge and paly a vrtal role guiding the destined future of the society of that age.

Nineteenth century India was passing though similar phase. Political slavery along with its side product economic crisis was adding to the miseris of the people. Social evils comprising of inhumane practices and superstitions were prevalent. Ideologically India was at cross roads. On one side western education was talking about rationality but completely ignorihg the cultural heritage, on the other side traditionalists were bent upon opposing everything modern. Under these circumstances, Swami Vivekankanda emerged on the horizon and tried to pull the masses out of this dilemma. Born on January 12, 1863, his childhood name was Narendernath Datta, popularly called as Bileh. His mother was Bhuwaneshwari Devi and father Bishwanath Datta. He got traditional *sanskaras* early education from the family. Narendra had sharp intellect and received English education from Presidency College, Calcutta. Before coming in contact with Ramakrishna Paramhansa, he was a member of Brahmo Samaj. He was of firm belief that God cannot be seen or realized in human form. At the young age of 18 years Narendra was pondering over the questions like purpose of life and existence of God. His search of these queries led him to Ramakrishna Paramhansa.

He wanted to have direct experience. Fort this he even joined Sadharan Brahma Samaj.¹ But he was not satisfied and even put forward the question of God to Debandranath Tagore and asked him, has he seen God? But the latter evaded the question and advised him to meditate. One day, Debandranath Tagore advised him by saying 'You have all the signs of a *Yogi* in your physiognomy. You can achieve peace and truth through meditation'.² His questions or dilemmas represented the questions of every age, so the answers have to be universal solutions.

¹ *The Life of Swami Vivekananda by His Eastern and Western Disciples*, Volume I, p. 56.

² Hansraj Rahbar, *Vivekananda The Warrior Saint*, p. 30.

One day, The European Professor was not able to make the students understand Wordsworth– the poet and he left the room in distress. Soon Principal William Hastie came to the class and started lecturing. During his lecture, he said that Wordsworth used to get trances etc. He further said that such a man is living in Dakshineswar (miles away from the college) who get trances.³ You go and see him. According to another view, Dr. Rama Chandra Datta – a relative of Narendra- asked him to visit Ramakrishna Paramhansa. Narendra's mother too admitted that it was Ram Chandra who brought Narendra to Ramakrishna.⁴ When Narendra visited Dakshineswar, Ramakrishna greeted him and made him sit on a mat near him. Narendra sang a song of Brahmo Samaj. After that, Ramakrishna took him into a room and said, "Is it proper that you should come so late? Should you not have once thought how I was waiting for you? Hearing continually the idle talk of worldly people, my ears have swelled up. From today, I shall have peace by talking to you as you are a true recluse".⁵

Narendra considered it madness and went to Dakshineswar after a month just to have a different experience. At the touch of Ramakrishna paramhansa, he saw that the walls, and everything in the room, whirled into naught, and the whole universe together with his individuality about to merge in an all – encompassing mysterious void! He cried out, "What is this that you are doing to me? I have my parents at home"!⁶ Ramakrishna laughed aloud at this and stroking his chest said, "All right, let it rest now. Everything will come in time!"⁷ Narendranath was testing each action of Ramakrishna on the touchstones of reason and logic. Narendra could not fare any better even during the next meeting. In fact, behind their Indian skin and complexion were two souls, representing two different types of cultural groups, one clinging credulously to the scriptural ideology of old days and the other getting itself freed from all trammels of dogmas.⁸

Narendra was still not able to understand this aspect of spirituality. He used to ridicule, "I am God, You are God, all things that are born and die are God". He would say further, "The brains of the *rishis* and *munis*, the author of such books must have been deranged; how otherwise could they have written such things....Can it ever be possible that the water pot is God, the cup is God, whatever we see and all of us are God"?⁹

Both Ramakrishna and Narendra were testing each other. The relationship between the two was unique in many respects. Narendra was not ready to accept a Guru without testing him. Like Aristotle who said, 'Dear is Plato but dearer still is Truth, he refused to yield to Ramakrishna so easily. But unlike Plato who called his pupil a fool that kicks his mother after draining her dry'.¹⁰ Ramakrishna described Narendra as pure gold without dross, a coin with no alloy whatsoever, ring it and you hear the truest sound.¹¹ Never did any Master shower so much love on his pupil.¹²

³³ Bhupendranath Datta, *Swami Vivekananda Patriot-Prophet*, p. 155.

⁴⁴ Asim Choudhuri, *Swami Vivekananda In Chicago New Findings*, p. 32.

⁵⁵ *The Life of Swami Vivekananda by His Eastern and Western Disciples*, Volume I, p. 76.

⁶⁶ Marie Louise Burke, *Swami Vivekananda In The West, New Discoveries*, Volume I, Advaita Ashrama, Calcutta, 1983, p. 7.

⁷⁷ *Life of Ramakrishna*, Advaita Ashrama, Calcutta, 1982, p. 333.

⁸⁸ Swami Nirvedananda, *Sri Ramakrishna and Spiritual Renaissance*, edited by Haridas Bhattacharya, *The Cultural Heritage of India*, Volume IV, Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Calcutta, 1967, p. 694.

⁹⁹ Swami Saradananda, *Sri Ramakrishna, The Great Master*, Volume II, pp.763,65.

¹⁰¹⁰ Will Durant, *The Study of Philosophy*, p. 60.

¹¹¹¹ Swami Saradananda, *Sri Ramakrishna, The Great Master*, Volume II, p. 750.

¹²¹² Satish K. Kapoor, *Cultural Contact and Fusion: Swami Vivekananda in the West (1893-96)*, p. 15.

Narendra was in a state of dilemma whether Ramakrishna a simple hearted man has actually realized the ultimate Truth. Slowly and gradually, his resistance started giving way to the spirituality of his master. This was the surrender of the most scientific mind before the highest spiritual soul of the world. One day he expressed desire to Ramakrishna that he wanted to have the experience of *Nirvakalpa Samadhi*. Ramakrishna reacted angrily. But when Narendra again insisted that, "I can have no peace of mind unless I can achieve *Nirvikalpa Samadhi* and I shall not be able to do anything else without this. Sri Ramakrishna replied, 'It is not your own volition that you will do these things. Mother will hold you by the neck to do all that you may not willingly do it, but your bones will do it' and thus allowed him saying "Go, you shall achieve it".¹³

Actually this was the age of conflict between science and religion. Westernized educated people were considering these two incompatible. Even in their philosophical part these were poles apart. Christian theological doctrines were in contradiction with modern science and on the other side dualistic principles were greatly influencing the scientists of that time. Nineteenth century science was based on four principles: 1. The Nebular Theory of the Universe. 2. The Atomic Theory of Physics. 3. The Darwinian Theory of Evolution or Biology. 4. The Behaviorist Theory of Psychology.¹⁴ It was for Vivekananda to synthesise Science and religion. As he proclaimed the arts, science and literature are nothing but three different ways of expressing the same truth. His theory of religion was universal and based on scientific lines as Romain Rolland calls it "Universal Science Religion." For Vivekananda the concept of religion lies in the divinity of the soul. Purpose of life is to manifest this divinity. In his words, "The goal is to manifest this divinity within by controlling nature, external and internal. Do this either by work, or worship or psychic control or philosophy, – by one or more or all of these, be free."¹⁵ He further emphasized that Vedanta is based on the concept of Universal religion as it advocates impersonification because it talks about principles and not persons. It does not follow one set of rules for all but caters to persons with different religious aspirations and their progress. Interestingly Vivekananda links the concept of universal brotherhood with universal selfhood. For him principles of Vedanta are in harmony with the outcomes of modern science. Vedanta acknowledges three aspects of religion namely; philosophy, mythology and rituals. That is why Vivekananda says, "I accept all religions that were in the past and worship with them all, I worship God with every one of them, in whatever form they worship him... The *Bible*, the *Vedas*, the *Quran*, all other sacred books are but so many pages, and an infinite number of pages remain yet to be unfolded. I would leave it open for all of them. We stand in the present, but open ourselves to infinite future. We take all that has been in the past; enjoy the light of the present, and open every window of the heart for all that are yet to come in the future".¹⁶

Giving philosophical exposition of religion based on reason, Vivekananda asserts, "Is Religion to justify itself by the discoveries of reason, through which every other science discovers itself? Are the same methods of investigation, which we apply to science and knowledge outside, to be applied to the science of Religion? In my opinion .this must be so; the sooner it is done the better. If a religion is destroyed by such investigation it was then all the time useless, unworthy superstition, and the sooner it goes the better. I am thoroughly convinced that its destruction would be the best thing that could happen."¹⁷ All that is dross will be taken off, no doubt, but the essential parts of religion will emerge triumphant out of this investigation. Not only will it be made scientific –as scientific, at least, as any of the conclusion of physics

¹³13 Marie Louise Burke, *Swami Vivekananda in The West, New Discoveries*, Volume III, p. 88.

¹⁴14 Santwana Dasgupta, *Social Philosophy of Swami Vivekananda*, p. 54.

¹⁵15 *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Volume I, p. 124.

¹⁶16 *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Volume II, p. 374.

¹⁷17 Santwana Dasgupta, *Social Philosophy of Swami Vivekananda*, p. 51.

or chemistry has no internal mandate to vouch for its truth, which religion has.¹⁸

Vivekananda was hopeful sooner science will also speak in the language of religion. Both will have to make concessions sometimes very large, nay more, sometimes painful, but each will find itself the better for the sacrifice and more advanced in turn. In the end, the knowledge, which is confined within the domain of time and space, will meet and become one with that which is beyond them both, where the mind and sciences cannot reach the absolute, the infinite, the one without a second.¹⁹ He further said, "This union will give us the highest philosophy-Science and religion will meet and shake hands. This will be the religion of the future, and if we can work it out, we may be sure that it will be for all times and peoples".²⁰

Vivekananda was countering the different approaches to the process of human development, one originated from the East and the other emanated from the West. 'These can be stated in the language of biology as stress on the environment in the West and the organism in the East'.²¹ He was very clear in judging the merits and demerits of these two. He embraced both as "an integral elements of a total human culture and proclaimed the modern age as the era of their synthesis".²² In other words, the conflict between the thesis represented by Anglican reformists, and the anti thesis represented by the reactionary Hindus was resolved by the synthesis propounded by Swami Vivekananda, which has been accepted as the basis for the evolution of Modern India.²³

To make his concept of Vedanta a practical Vedanta he coined a new word *Daridra-Narayan*²⁴ or a "God in the poor and lowly". It brought a sense of responsibility in every man to look upon the poor and the humble, as if they were fragments of God. To serve them is to serve God. Swami Vivekananda raised service to the dignity of religion and gave it a divine status. "Him I call a *mahatma* whose heart bleeds for the poor", wrote Swami Vivekananda to his Indian disciples in 1894-95.²⁵ He always urged his disciples to serve the poor and the oppressed.

During the great epidemic of plague in Calcutta, a religious scholar complained that he was not getting any opportunity to discuss religion with Swami Vivekananda. He replied. "So long as even a single dog in my country is without food, my whole religion will be to feed it".²⁶ That was to him the essence of religion. This was a new thought, a life giving amrit churned out of the poisonous ocean that had kept India in darkness for centuries.

In 1898, when plague broke out, Vivekananda led from the front to provide the relief work. He guided the students and organised them to inspect the houses of the poor and to provide relief. He even ordered his *sannyasin* disciples to sell the monasteries, 'Sell it, if necessary. We are *sannyasins*, we ought to always be ready to sleep under the trees and live on to what we beg everyday'.²⁷ He himself came to live in a poor locality to inspire courage in the people and cheer up the workers. Vivekananda thundered, "Your *bhakti* is sentimental nonsense, which makes one impotent. Who cares for *bhakti* or *mukti*? Who cares what the scriptures say? I will go into a thousand hells cheerfully, if I can rouse my countrymen,

¹⁸18 *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Volume I, p. 257.

¹⁹19 *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Volume II, p. 69.

²⁰20 *Ibid.*, p. 140.

²¹21 A. V. Rathna Reddy, *The Political Philosophy of Swami Vivekananda*, p. 169.

²²22 Swami Ranganathananda, *The Meeting of East and West in Swami Vivekananda*, Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Calcutta, 1968, p. 108.

²³23 R. C. Majumdar, *Vivekananda-A Historical Review*, Advaita Ashrama, Calcutta, 1999, p. 139.

²⁴24 *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Volume VII, p. 245.

²⁵25 *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Volume V, p. 58.

²⁶26 *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Volume II, p. 782.

²⁷27 Romain Rolland, *The Life of swami Vivekananda and The Universal Gospel*, p. 132.

immersed in tomes, to stand on their own feet and be men inspired with the spirit of *karma yoga*. I am not a follower of Ramakrishna or anyone, I am a follower of him only who serves and helps others without his own *bhakti* or *mukti*".²⁸

Conclusions: Swami Vivekanand per se spiritual genius of extraordinary intellect tho born in a period when India was under British rule and people work demoralized and convinced about the periodity of western culture and ideas he immerse like a lion and clear the dark clouds and field the masses with self confidence is successfully counted the challenges of modern science and prove that religion is also scientific rather religion is the size of consciousness. Hissa human excellence ine mainalines as proclaimed by the west and spirituality the basic character of the east he had it brought vision and his ideas and ideas are timeless and ensure the total development of man.

²⁸38 Swami Nikhalananda, *Swami Vivekananda-A Biography*, Advaita Ashrama, Calcutta, 1970, p.128.