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VIVEKANANDA'S CONCEPT OF NEO - VEDANTA

M. MUNIRATHNAM

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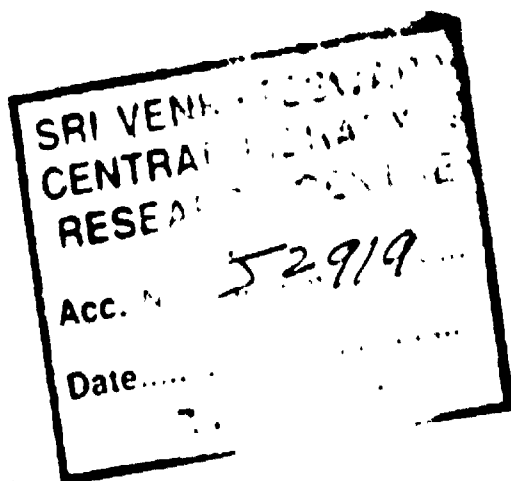
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FOREWORD

The edifice of philosophy of Swamy Vivekananda is built on the foundations of divinity of man and service to humanity. Swamiji in one of his letters observes "Let each one of us pray day and night for the down-trodden millions of Indians who are held fast by poverty priest-craft and tyranny. I am no metaphysician no philosopher, nay no saint. But I am poor. I love the poor. Who feels for the two hundred millions of men and women sunken for ever in poverty and ignorance? Who feels for them? They cannot find light of the education, who will bring light to them, who will travel from door to door, bring education to them? Hence, I call a Mahatma whose heart bleeds for the poor" (letters of Swamy Vivekananda P. 264 Advaita Ashram). As it is obvious Swamy Vivekananda's philosophical reflection emanated from his experience of situations of life. His teachings centre round man in flesh and blood aimed at his empirical well being (Abhyudaya) and the ultimate liberation (Nishreyas).

Classical Vedānta with its intricate commentaries and sub-commentaries too subtle to be of any tangible use for a man in his day to day living, looked far removed from the lives of the people. Swamy Vivekananda brought Vedānta to masses. His conception that god is both personal and

impersonal, that man at heart in god, that different religions are not really antagonistic to one another, but alternative paths leading to spiritual perfection, that religious life does not consist in lapsing into isolation, but living in the midst of people serving the poor, nursing the sick, educating the illiterate, working for the economic and social uplift of the masses, finally leading them to transcendence - all these testify to his type of Vedanta called as 'Neo-Vedanta' and 'Practical Vedanta'. He worked assiduously for material development and spiritual progress of Indian masses. He had a mission and he fulfilled it.

I am happy that Mr. Munirathnam worked on such a spiritual giant who had genuine concern for the down trodden, the meek and the poor. Mr. Munirathnam presented the central teachings of Swamy Vivekananda in a systematic form. The work is authentic, clear and informative. The treatment is thorough and scientific. It would help people to get insights into the philosophy of life that Swamy Vivekananda practised and preached.

I recommended the work to the scholarly world and I wish Mr. Munirathnam best of luck.

TIRUPATI,

Date : 20-4-1994

Dr. C. Ramaiah

Professor of Philosophy

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M. Munirathnam

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Introduction

Hindu Religion is neither a particular system nor a particular faith but a common wealth of systems and a fellowship of faith. It is not the product of the spiritual genius of any single individual, however great he may be, but new approach and interpretation of many individual seekers.

Religion in India, as far as our knowledge goes, started with Indus valley civilization. In those days the people were icon worshippers and mother-Goddess played a vital role in the religious life of the people. People worshipped Lord Śiva and animal worship was also not uncommon.

India was Aryanised and the religious life they led could be traced to the natural spontaneous utterances of the Rsis of the Rgveda. We note that the religion and philosophy of the Aryans were plain and simple. They were very much impressed with the working of the mysterious powers of Nature and hence attributed supernatural and divine character to them. They treated them as Gods and worshipped them. Thus the Gods, Dyauh, Varuna, Mitra, Sūrya, Savitr, Pusan, Viṣnu, Āditya, Uṣas, Aśvins, Indra, Apānapah, Rudra, Vāyu, Vātaparjanya, Āpah, Mātariśva, Pṛthvi, Agni, Śiva, Bṛhaspati and rivers were worshipped as Gods and these Gods were at the beginning thirty three and can be divided into

three types - 1) Celestial Gods, 2) Aerial Gods and 3) Terrestrial Gods. Though many people worship God in many forms, the underlying principle was one (Ekam-sat-viprah bahudhā-vadanti)

In this period all these objects of Nature were deified and given the shape of human beings. People worshipped them to bestow more and more prosperity, health and strength on them as they are endowed with supernatural powers. There was no image worship and no priestly class. Every one was priest by himself. When we come to the next period we observe many Gods of the Rgveda went to the background. The idea of a supreme God flashed on the minds of the people. He is only one God. He is Prajāpati, the creator, the preserver and destroyer of the universe and Brahman was considered the first cause of all existence and of the oneness of the man with the world soul.

Slowly Rituals and Sacrifice were elaborated. The Institutions of sacrifice became prominent and all important. A systematic science of sacrifice and construction of Fire Altars was evolved. Sacrifices became very much complicated and priests who happened to be brahmins, specialized in the branch of Sacrifices established supremacy.

This karmakānda, in the next period paved way to the emergence of another stream of intellectual thought that gave rise to the philosophical speculations, regarding the relationship between the Nature, God and Man (Jñānakānda). According to this, Brahman is supreme and he is the creator and controller of this universe. He is the universal soul and every one ultimately reaches this soul only. The duration of reaching this absolute soul depends upon the good and bad action of the individual. Thus we notice that

there is the transmigration of soul and karmasiddhanta. According to these philosophers liberation or moksha could be attained by meditating upon self and true knowledge or jñāna as envisaged in the Upanishads. This system was also developed in a logical manner.

In the Sūtra period there was the growth of ritualistic religion. The Epic period witnessed the receding nature of the Rgvedic gods into oblivion. The concept of trinity came to a prominent position. The three gods - Brahma, Viṣṇu, Mahēśvara together as gods in charge of creation, sustenance and dissolution became dominant.

Sixth century B.C. was the period in which India witnessed religious unrest. There was revolt against the Brahmanism. The supremacy of the priests, the complex ritualistic atmosphere, the graded caste system could not be tolerated like other parts of the world. In India there was a revolution in the religious thought. It discarded social immobility, inequality and injustice. On the other hand it upheld the sanctity of human intellect and its freedom. The aim of the revolt was not materialistic but spiritual. There was no socialisation but spiritualization of the life. The thoughts and principles based on humanitarian consideration gained momentum as against the slaughtering of animals in the sacrifices. Thus the new idea automatically rejected the authority of the Vedas. It was completely based on right conduct, ahimsa, equal right for men and women of all castes to acquire liberation etc. On these principles which attracted mass of people, Vardhamana Mahavira and Buddha profounded their religions.

In a nut-shell Jainism is against vedic sacrifice, rites and supremacy of Brahmins. Jainism does not believe in the Existence of God. The best life is that of renunciation

It also does not believe in any creator of the Universe. The perfect man himself is God. It advocates Ahimsa and Tri, Ratnas.¹ The life consists of soul and matter mati, sruti avadhi, mana etc. It has faith in the theory of karma and rebirth Nirvāna, according to which, it is an escape from the circle of transmigration. Man is the architect of his own destiny. Referring to Ātma, Jainism says that it is of two categories – conscious called jiva and unconscious called ajiva. Ahimsa, satya, asteya, aparigraha and brahmacarya are the five ethical codes that are assigned for both house holder and monk.

Similarly Buddha also preached Buddhism as against Brahmanism. He too did not believe in the authority of the Vedas and Sacrifices. He was against caste system and hence admitted all without caste discrimination. According to Buddha all are eligible to attain nirvāna. Self improvement and virtuous life are the keys to attain nirvāna. Buddha taught four noble truths² and eight fold path³ to get over sorrow which is the main cause for degenerating a person. He also preached ahimsa. He accepted the law of karma and transmigration. Nirvāna, according to him, is the state of tranquility to be realised by a person who is free from all cravings.

1. Right knowledge, Right faith and Right conduct are three Ratns.
2. Four noble truths are : 1. The world is full of miseries.
2. Sensual pleasure is the reason for the miseries.
3. These sufferings can be averted, and
4. The ways to destroy sorrow.
3. Eight fold paths : Right views, Right aspirations, Right speech, Right action, Right living, Right efforts, Right mindfulness and Right contemplation.

In the Sunga period (187-75 B.C.) Brahmanism was again patronised. It restored the Brahmanic faith, rituals and sacrifices and the supremacy of brahmins. Brahmanism gave a new outlook to its structure. It took into its fold whatever good was found in other beliefs. Brahmanism witnessed at this stage the dichotomy in its branches. These ideas found favour with the Guptas. Hinduism once again raised its head and became the religion of the royal court and country. Buddhism lost its hold due to many reasons like character of Baudha Bhikshūs', loss of Royal support, division of Buddhism into 18 sects etc. Even in the 7th century we found only harmonious blending of these two isms namely Brahmanism and Buddhism.

New Religion :

After the decline of Vardhana dynasty, India miserably lacked political social and religious unity. A number of religions came into existence in India Alberuni, an Arabian traveller to India gives reference to 42 religions in India at that time. Under the impact of Buddhism the Brahmanism witnessed various changes. In the New Hinduism nature was worshipped through three different forms i.e., Brahma, Visnu, Śiva symbolizing the origin sustenance and dissolution of nature. In order to popularise New Hinduism Buddha was also included as an incarnation. The New Hinduism was a mixture of ancient Brahmanism and Mahayana from of Buddhism. It sounded the death-knell of Buddhism and the influence of Jainism became disappeared. Kumarila Bhatta and Sankaracarya were the prominent pioneers of the New Religion. Particularly it was enthroned on a high pedestal by philosophers like Sankaracarya.

Here Sankara's philosophy is discussed in some what detailed manner as Vivekananda's Neo-Vedanta is the practical Vedanta of Sri Sankaracarya. Sankara is the thought and Vivekananda is the expression of Sankara's thought. 1) According to Sankara, the conscious Absolute principle is the Reality i.e., Brahman, Brahman is nirvi kalpa and nirviseṣa. It is one (ekam) indivisible (akhaṇḍa) without second (advitiya) having in itself no difference (abheda) either sajjātya, vijātiya or svagata. 2) Jiva, which is the same as Brahman is self-illuminated, unlimited and ever free. This limitedness and consequent effects are due to upādhis or conditions which again appear through avidya (nescience). If this avidya is removed the apparent duality ceases. 3) Brahman simply appears as the world through avidya. The world has phenomenal reality but no reality of its own (Brahma satyam jagan mitya). 4) Brahmanhood is realised by the knowledge of the absolute identity of Jiva and Brahman. The upanishadic statement "Tat tvam asi" reveals this identity. Mukti (mokṣa) or liberation is nothing but the realization of this identity. 5) Permanent Bliss can be attained by knowledge (jñāna) and once enlightenment is attained no work is necessary.

Subsequently we hear of philosophers like Ramanuja (Profounder of Viśiṣṭādvaita), Nimbarka, Sri Madhvacarya (Profounder of Dvaita) Vallabhacarya and others. Vaiṣṇavism, Śaivism and their sects, chaitanya movement, Tantric school of thought, Sikkism etc., also came into existence. Religions like Zoroastrianism, Christianity, Islam, sufism etc., from abroad reached India and began to influence its people. It was up to the great philosophical thinkers like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Dayananda Sarasvathi and others to mould the Hindu Religion more accommodative and logical. They thought that it was their duty to see that Hinduism is not lost in essence though superficial changes occur from time to time.

Raja Ram Mohan Roy - Brahmo Samaj (1774-1833)

Raja Ram Mohan Roy started Brahmo Samaj. He is a philosopher, theologian, as well as the great social reformer. Sir Monier Williams named Raja as the herald of a new age. Miss Cobden says, "Raja Mohan Roy stands in history as the living bridge over which India marches from her unmeasured past to her incalculable future. He was the arch which spanned the gulf between the ancient and modern, between superstition and science, between despotism and democracy, between immobile custom and conservative progress, between a bewildering polytheism and a pure monotheistic system". The epithets like "the father of Indian Renaissance" or "the prophet of Indian Nationalism" describe his leading role in the social and religious reforms and in the political regeneration of his fellow nationals. He was acclaimed to be a vedantist by the Hindus, a theist by the Unitarians, a Christian by the Christians and a Muslim by the Mohammedians. He assimilated whatever good was there in all religions.

Dayananda Sarasvathi - Arya Samaj (1824 - 1863)

The Arya Samaj was founded on the 10th April 1875 at Bombay. Some of the important principles of Arya Samaj are - 1) The first efficient cause of all knowledge and all that is known through knowledge is Parmesvara, who is existent, intelligent, blissful, formless, omnipotent, just, merciful, unborn, endless, unchangeable, beginningless, unequalled, omnipresent, immanent, unaging, immortal, fearless, eternal, holy and the maker of all. 2) The Vedas are the scriptures of true knowledge. 3) According to dharma, one should act. 4) The physical, spiritual and social welfare of the entire world is the aim of this society.

Dayananda Sarasvati inculcated in the people a faith of optimism about their future. The Hindu society purified of its evils was prepared to fight for freedom. He was the first historical figure of India who preached the cult of Swadeshi for the Indians. Through his teaching the people were made aware of India's past and Indians took pride in their heritage and wished to build up a similar future.

Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa

On the basis of spiritual experience, Ramakrishna preached the gospel of the unity of all religions. He urged for the cessation of inter-religious strife. He said if all spiritual paths within and without Hinduism, if perfectly followed, lead to the same goal. This goal is already enunciated in the vedas. He gave message to all in his address : "Waste not your time in partisan squabbles over the superiority of this or that creed or this or that religion but seek God with a pure and dedicated heart." According to him every jiva is Śiva or God. Worship of jiva is the real worship of the Supreme.

Vivekananda, the disciple of Ramakrishna followed the principles of his master. He is an Advaitin. He, in order to fulfil the mission of his guru, devoted all his energies to the service of poor people. He insisted upon celibacy in order to live a truly spiritual life. He pleaded for the importance of symbolism of Indian worship. He created new spirit and generated a powerful current of fresh life in the blood of Hindus. He proved that Hinduism is not a dying religion but an inexhaustible fountain of true spirituality.

CHAPTER - I

VIVEKANANDA, HIS LIFE AND FORMATION OF RELIGIO - PHILOSOPHICAL IDEAS

In the larger part of the 19th century, India witnessed the profound impact of western thought, Christian mission and the consolidation of British political domination. This was the period of India's economic impoverishment, the decline and pauperisation of Indian Artisans and craftsmen and the proletarianisation of India's peasantry. Famine became a common feature and poverty became much more conspicuous fact of Indian life. Dayananda Saraswathi, Ram Mohan Roy, Ramakrishna and others being overwhelmed with sorrow of the plight of the people and wished strongly to uplift them from what is known as superstitions and old customs started institutions like Arya Samaj and Brahma Samaj etc. Actually the purpose of the Indian renaissance was to awaken the people of India to realise the values of the ancient culture which they had merely forgotten. Exactly in this dire distress condition Swamy Vivekananda, originally known as Naren or Narendra Nath Dutt, was born in Calcutta on Monday, January 12, 1863 to the compassionate and sympathetic couple Bhuvaneshwari Devi and Viswanadha Dutta, an attorney in the high court of Calcutta.

At the age of six, Narendra was sent to a Pāthasāla but his parents withdrew him from primary school because he acquired disconcerting vocabulary from his fellow pupils. A tutor was appointed and Narendra showed a lot of improvement. He learnt Sanskrit grammar. At the age of seven according to S. S. Mital¹ and at the age of eight according to V. K. R. V. Rao² he joined metropolitan institute of Iswara Chandra Vidya Sagar and mastered many standard works of English, Bengali Literature and Indian History. He came to be known for his exceptional intelligence, inexhaustible energy and restlessness. It may be recalled that Narendra in the initial stages showed a lot of aversion towards English but when insisted upon by both his parents and the teacher he astonished every one by the ease with which he learnt and mastered it. An incident narrated about his school life will testify that he was truthful, extraordinary intelligent and could talk and listen simultaneously. One day when Naren and his friends were talking among themselves during a class lecture the lecturer asked them questions. Except Naren all failed to answer. So the lecturer asked the rest of the students to get up on the bench. Naren also stood up on the bench. When enquired Naren fearlessly and honestly admitted his mistake that he was the main cause for talking and as he was bestowed with the gift of concentrating both on talking and listening, he could manage the situation.

In 1877 Naren was a student of third class. During this year his father left for Raipur leaving Calcutta. Two years rolled by, They returned to Calcutta and for this period Naren did not pursue his studies. Soon after their return he again

1. The social and political ideas of Swamy Vivekananda' p. 22,

2. Swami Vivekananda p. 13.

started reading and he completed 3 years studies in one year and then at the age of 16 he became qualified to take up collegiate education

Naren was admitted to the Presidency College but left the same year after to join the General Assembly's Institution founded by the Scottish mission board, subsequently known as the Scottish Church College. He came out successfully in the first Arts examination in 1881, securing second class and then he completed his B.A. in 1884. Afterwards he joined the Law College but unfortunately he could not complete it. Though he did not secure academic distinction in his degree course he mastered western logic, western philosophy and ancient and modern history of different European Nations during the first two years of his college career. Unfortunately he lost his father when he was in degree course¹. As a result, his family faced economic crisis. Even the house in which he with his mother was staying was claimed by somebody who seemed to be the heir. He had to go to the court of law and with the help of W. C. Benerjee a friend of his father, won the case and retained his house.

Naren could not get bread either for himself or for his mother. He worked hard and at last secured a job in the institute of V. d. Vasagar. Even this earnings did not meet the minimum expenditure of the family. But he stood firm against this poverty and he slowly developed detachment towards the material enjoyment.

1. T. M. P. Mahadevan, G. V. Saroja, Contemporary Indian Philosophy, p. 104.

2. B. Venkateswarlu, Sri Vivekananda Swamy Jivitamu, p. 41.

From the childhood itself he developed spiritual bent of mind and he had the quest for the whereabouts of God. He used to meet many people to know about this. First meeting with Sri Ramakrishna in 1881, was followed by many more meetings during the next 3 years of his college life. He was influenced by the writings of Herbert Spencer, Kant, Schopenhauer, Auguste Comte and John Stuart Mill with his "Three Essays on Religion and Hume". When he noticed his economic backwardness, Vivekananda went to his master and urged him to pray his divine mother to give him relief. As advised by his master he approached the image and found there that the image was the living conscious divine mother and in his ecstasy of joy he prayed for discrimination, renunciation and knowledge of devotion. But the original purpose for which he went was forgotten. Again when he approached his master he was asked to repeat the same. Second time also the same thing has happened. Like this he tried thrice but could not achieve what he originally intended. At last, Ramakrishna bestowed him with a boon that his mother and himself would get enough simple food and clothing.

Naren wanted to have Nirvikalpa samādhi. One day when he was meditating upon, he felt a light at the back of his head, his mind became dissolved in it. One of his brother disciples reported this condition of Naren to Ramakrishna who remarked "let him stay in that state for a while. He has teased me long enough for it". Then Naren returned to his normal condition and all his doubts regarding the existence of God vanished. Ramakrishna told that he would get Nirvikalpa samādhi as soon as he completes his mission.

Ramakrishna passed away in 1886 and then Naren had to keep the co-disciples together. In 1887 they performed the Vraja Homa, became ascetics and took Sannyāsa - names.

In 1888 he started his life of wanderings. A Station Master became his first disciple, who renounced the world and became Sadananda (as a monk). This Swami Sadananda accompanied Naren to Himalayas. But Naren fell ill and so they have to come back to the monastery at Baranagore. Again for the second time he undertook the trip. He met Pavahari Baba at Cahazipur and he was about to take Yoga practice but a vision of Ramakrishna made him to go back to Baranagore.

With Swami Akhandananda, Vivekananda again set out to the Himalayan in 1898. He took a firm decision not to return. He wanted to become a Parivrājaka (a wandering monk) and in that pursuit he travelled forests and deserts. He starved some times, he lived upon alms and at times honoured by the kings and nobles. Once when he was meditating upon the rock in Kanyakumari he had a vision on the past, present and future of India, and After worshipping Goddesses, he felt that it was his duty to bring back the glory of India. So he sent selfless service-minded Sannyasins to rural areas to uplift the people.

Vivekananda came to Madras, and many young men became his disciples. He collected voluntary funds for his voyage to America as his disciples wanted him to represent Hinduism in the parliament of religions to be held at Chicago. He wanted to know the wish of the Goddess. So he distributed the funds to the poor. On that day he had a dream where he saw the figure of his master walking on the Seashore beckoning him to cross the ocean. He again collected funds and on 31st of May 1893 with the help of Raja of Ketri he set sail from Bombay to Vancouver. From there he proceeded to Chicago by tram. He reached this place six weeks early and he came to know that only a representative of an organisation could take part in the Parliament. On his way to Boston from Chicago

to a rich lady travelling in the same tram was much attracted by the intelligence of this young monk and took him to her house. She introduced him to J. H. Wright, Professor of Greek of Harvard University. J. H. Wright wrote a letter to his friend Dr. Barrows the Chairman of Committee for the selection of delegates, "Here is a man who is more learned than all learned Professors put together." The rich lady gave some more letters of introduction to some of the members of the selection committee. Unfortunately he lost these letters and addresses. Consequently he had to expose himself to the chill-weather and begged for food. When he was sitting, next day, on the side of the road a lady residing opposite to the road invited him and when she came to know that he came to attend the religious meeting she took him to the office of the Parliament.

On September 11, 1893 the first session of the World Parliament of Religions began in Chicago. A brief address delivered by Vivekananda captured the hearts of the people assembled. Then he delivered Lectures, conducted meditation classes, dictated the book *Rāja Yoga* and translation of *Yoga sūtras* of Patanjali. From Chicago he came to New York from where he sailed for England. He met sister Nivedita. Again he came back to America and lectured in Harvard on *Karma Yoga*, *Bhakti Yoga* and *Jñāna Yoga*. During February 1896 he organised the Vedanta Society of New York. He met Max Muller and Paul Dausson at London.

Swamiji came back to India. First he landed on Colombo. From there he proceeded to Almora in the Himalayas. In Amarnath he was completely absorbed in meditation and had the vision of mother Kali and wrote poem on Kali. As soon as he completed this poem his pen fell down and he lost his consciousness. When he regained his consciousness he was completely changed. He wished for the life of the monk. He

longed for rags, shaven heads, sleep under trees and food by begging. He returned to Belur in October 1898. He took part in the consecration ceremony of the new monastery. In 1899 the Advaita Ashrama was founded by him in Almora. Again he left for New York with sister Nivedita. On 1st August 1900 he came to Paris to address the Congress of the History of Religions. In 1900 he returned to Belur.

He was a patient of diabetes and asthma. He told Premananda to cremate his body after his death at a particular spot. On 4th July 1902, he rose early, had tea, meditation for 3 hours, dined with his fellow monks handled the Sanskrit grammar class for 3 hours, went on walk with Premananda, meditated between 7 p.m. and 8 p.m. and laid down on his bed. An hour later his hand shook a little and he breathed his last.

Influence of Vedas on Vivekananda

Vivekananda was influenced by the Vedas, the Upanisads and The Gita. He says "by the Vedas no books are meant. They mean the accumulated treasure of spiritual laws discovered by different persons in different times"¹ All systems of philosophy in India that are orthodox have to take the Vedānta as their foundation.² The word Vedānta literally means the end of the Vedasusually by the word Vedas in India, the Vedānta is meant.³ Vedānta at times means the Upanisads as the Upaniāds form the end of Vedas. But strictly speaking it is not so, for instance, if Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad is taken into consideration it is found in the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa. In the same way the Īśavāsyā Upaniṣad is the 40th Chapter of

1. Vivekananda, The Complete Works, Vol. I, p. 13.

2. Ibid., p. 358.

3. Ibid., p. 357.

the Vājasaneyā Samhitā. So this meaning of Upaniṣad being found at the end of the Vedas seems to be not correct. Then what does Vedānta mean? It seems when a student goes to the teacher for vedic knowledge the Upaniṣads are taught towards the end of the curriculum as it is not easy to grasp the highest wisdom of unity of the finite with the infinite in the initial stages. Vivekananda was metaphysician of the Vedānta School. He made constant efforts to realize the propaganda of the Vedānta Philosophy. He was seriously thinking of presenting the Vedas and the Vedānta in such a simple manner in which people could understand easily and thus enabling India to take up once again the position and glory she once enjoyed in the world thought

Influence of the Upaniṣads on Vivekananda

Vivekananda was influenced by the Philosophical speculations of the Upaniṣads. He in his lectures tried to interpret them scientifically in an intelligible, practical and improved manner to see them most easily understandable. The contents of the Upaniṣads provide the core of Vivekananda's thinking. According to him the Upaniṣads which treat spiritual matters, apart from the ceremonials are called the Upaniṣads. These belong to the Jñānakanda or knowledge portion.¹ Etymologically the word Upaniṣad is derived from upa+ni+sad adding the suffix kvip to the root sadl. According to Sankara and his followers the root sadl has three meanings: 1. to attain (gati) 2. to listen (visarana) and 3. to destroy (avasadana).² Though Vivekananda admits that he gives

1. Complete works of Swamy Vivekananda, Vol. I, p. 357

2. Sader dhātor Visaranagatya vasādanārthasyopanipūrvasya-kvipratyayāntasya rūpām idm upaniṣad iti / Sankara on Katha-Upaniṣad, Introduction

respect to the teachings of his guru Sri Ramakrishna he gives first place always to the Upani-ads. Though he did not try to translate any Upani-ad, he in his lectures and Writings, quoted altogether 191 different passages from the Upani-ad, many of them have been repeated for forty times. The most striking Upanisadic passage which he quoted repeatedly is 'tat tvam as 'thou art that' which indicates the identity of Jīva, the individual soul with Brahman¹ the supreme spirit. Surprisingly he gives a wonderful clarity of thought in explaining this concept. Next passage which attracted him and repeated by him is from Ka ha Upani ad, the often quoted verse is 'sharp as the blade of a razor long and difficult and hard to cross is the way to freedom'².

Influence of the Gītā

The Gītā, one of the Prasthāna trays³ had its natural influence over Naren. The Gītā is the essence of the Upani-ads⁴. His doctrine of philosophy of action (work) renunciation, and service, modes of worship, love the neighbour as your self, etc. were based on the Bhagavad Gītā. While giving lectures at Chicago he remarked that whose soul ever come to me through what so ever from..... I reach him. All men are struggling through paths which in the end lead to me⁵. He justified the view that the Gītā is the milk flowing out of the Upani-ads of the various philosophical stands by a master mind⁶.

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1. Chandogya Upani-ad, 6, 8, 2.
 2. Utti-sthata jāgrata prāpya varān nibodhata / Ksurasya dhārī niśitā duratyaya durgam pratis tāt kavayo vadanti /
 3. Prasthāna trayas are vedas, Upani-ads and Bhagavad Gītā.
 4. Vivekananda, The complete works Vol I, P.333
 5. S S. Mital, op.cit, p. 28.
 6. Sarvopanisado gāvah dugdhā gopālanandanah etc ,

Influence of Buddha and Sankara

A perusal at Vivekananda's letters¹ reveal that at first he was not an Advaitin. He was more attracted towards the gospel of Buddhism. He once declared : Lord Buddha is my I-sta, my God. While he was at Baranagore math he studied a lot of Buddhist works. He referred to Buddha many a time in his Complete works. He observed Buddha is a man who perfectly practised the principle of work without attachment and at the same time worked incessantly for the good of all. He never accepted that Buddhism and Brahmanism were fundamentally opposite

Intellectually he accepts the supremacy of Sri Sankara carya, an advaita philosopher. According to Vivekananda the ideal man should have the heart of the Buddha and the intellect of Sri Sankaracarya

Meeting with Devendranath Tagore

His inquisitiveness to know about God is so much that Vivekananda whom ever he met, used to ask the questions did you see God ? Once he met Devendranath Tagore, (the father of Rabindranath Tagore) the leader of the Brahma Samaj, and asked him, 'Sir have you seen God ?' Devendranath replied, "my boy, you have the eyes of a Yogi. You should practise meditation". This prophesy of Devendranath came true and Vivekananda became a Yogi and a great Philosopher. He did not get satisfactory answer from any body till he met Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa, the student of Totapuri.

1. Vide Letter of August, 7, 1889.

2. S. S. Mital, *op cit.*, p. 28.

Influence of Sri Ramakrishna

Vivekananda met Ramakrishna when he was studying B A itself. He put his usual question to Ramakrishna, "Did you see God?" Ramakrishna replied "Yes I have seen God I see him as clearly as I see you here, only more clearly¹. He exclaimed, 'Lord, I know, you are the ancient sage Nara the incarnation of Nārāyana born on earth to remove the miseries of mankind'² Naren did not accept immediately Ramakrishna as his teacher. It took five or six years for him to accept him as his guru. The final transition came three or four years before the passing away of Sri Ramakrishna in August 1886. Romain Rolland says, 'From that movement all the powers of the master were transferred to Narendranath — the master and the disciple are one.'

The relationship of Ramakrishna and Vivekananda can be compared with that of Socrates and Plato. It was a unique combination. Sri Ramakrishna was thought and Vivekananda was the expression of that thought³. Vivekananda honestly admitted that 'if there has ever been a word of a truth, a word of spirituality that I have spoken anywhere in the world, I owe it to my master only, the mistakes are mine'⁴. To him Ramakrishna was a living illustration of the ideas that he preached — and his life was an embodiment of knowledge, love, renunciation, catholicity and service of mankind.⁵ Viveka

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1. Nikhulananda Swami, *Vivekananda-a Biography*, p. 13.
 2. Eastern and Western disciples, *The Life of Vivekananda*, p. 46.
 3. A R. Wadia, *Swamy Vivekananda Philosophy and Religion*, *Swamy Vivekananda centenary memorial, Volume*, p. 252.
 4. *The Complete works of Swamy Vivekananda*, Vol. IV p. 181.
 5. *Ibid*, p. 160.
 6. *Ibid.*, Vol. III, p. 473.

nanda learnt that brotherhood of men, the motherhood of deity and the pain of neighbours have to be felt and realized. This has a great impact on his mind. He also learnt from his master that the great bars to all brotherly feelings between man and man are the various religious derominations and these must be broken and destroyed ¹ This can be achieved for love is the only law of life and all love is expansion ²

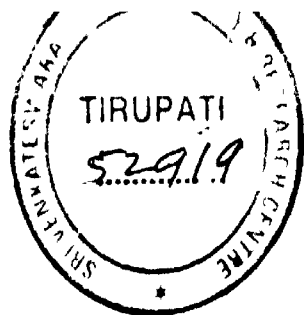
The religion of Ramakrishna Paramahansa may be summerised under three headings 1. Belief in the unity of all religions, 2. Jiva is Siva himself not mere man, but god 3. The service for man must be regarded as service to God. The aim of mission that he had in mind is to offer service (seva) to others.

Vivekananda successfully gave expression to the thought of his Guru. Taking the essential content from the feelings of Ramakrishna and basing his own teachings on it Vivekananda formulated his own religion and philosophical vedānta which came to be known as Neo Vedanta. The tenets of Neo Vedanta will be discussed in the coming chapter

His Works

Vivekananda's messages, lectures, philosophical discourses, letters are published in the complete works in 8 volumes. They have altogether more than 4000 pages. A summary of all the eight volumes is given below.

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1. The Complete works of Swamy Vivekananda, Vol. VI p. 303.
 2. Ibid., Vol. VI p. 322



The Complete works - Vol I¹

This volume contains Chicago addresses, Karma Yoga and Rāja Yoga, Lectures and 18 other discourses with an introduction by sister Nivedita.

The Complete works - Vol II²

It consists of 34 lectures of Vivekananda dealing with Karma Yoga, Sāṅkya Philosophy and his lectures on Jñāna Yoga

The Complete works - Vol. III³

This volume covers 3 new lectures on Jñāna yoga, the books on Bhakti Yoga and lectures from Colombo to Almora.

The Complete works - Vol IV.⁴

This volume contains the addresses on 'Bhakti Yoga' my master, the original writings prose and poem - and translation of writings - prose and poems - including modern India, 16 stray lectures.

The Complete works - Vol. V.⁵

It consists of 124 Epistles, original and translation, 11 interviews, Notes from lectures and discourses numbering 22, questions and answers, conversations and dialogues, sayings and utterances etc.

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1. Complete works by Buddhananda, Advaita Ashrama, Calcutta, July 1962.
 2. C.W by Gambirananda, Advaita Ashrama, Calcutta, 1963
 3. C W by Chidatmananda, Advaita Ashrama; Calcutta 1964
 4. Complete works by Chidatmananda : Advaita Ashrama; Calcutta, 1962.
 5. Complete works of Swamy Vivekananda (Ed.) by Buddhananda Advaita Ashrama, Calcutta; August 1963.

The Complete works - Vol VI¹

This covers lectures and discourses, notes of class talks, sayings and utterances 2, writings – prose and poetry III, translation of writings IV. Epistles, conversation and dialogues.

The Complete works - Vol VII²

It consists of inspired talks, conversation and dialogues Epistles notes from class talks, memories of European travels

The Complete works - VIII³

It consists of discussions on Jñāna Yoga, six lessons on Rāja Yoga, 5 lectures, sayings and utterances III, Epistles etc.

A study of Vivekananda's writings will lead us to the interpretation and application of India's ancient ideals, the divinity of man and the spiritual oneness of universe to the modern life promote better knowledge and understanding of other cultures, promote the study of the cultural heritage of mankind as whole etc.

1. Complete works of Swamy Vivekananda (Ed) by Swami Chidatmananda Advaita Ashrama Calcutta, Sept 1964.
2. Complete works of Swami Vivekananda (Ed) by Buddhananda Advaita Ashrama, Calcutta October 1964
3. Complete works of Swamy Vivekananda (ed.) by Chidatmananda Advaita Ashram, Calcutta, December 1964.

CHAPTER - II

SANKARA AND RAMAKRISHNA

Indian thinkers followed two directions in the quest for truth. The first is external and the other is internal. The external quest is accomplished in the performance of sacrifices (Karmakāṇḍa) and final answer for this external quest is the monotheistic God. But Indian thinkers were not satisfied by this external quest. The internal quest is the study of consciousness more important than the external world. This inward study of consciousness is found embodied in the jñānakāṇḍa in the Upaniṣads. Here alone we find the great, ever illuminating light in the form of Ātma-Brahma doctrine.

The term Vedānta, the last portions of Vedās means the Upaniṣads and their teachings. It is not correct to identify the term Vedānta with the Advaita Vedanta of Sankaracarya alone. There are different schools of Vedānta representing different levels of thoughts found in the Upaniṣads and in a way convey all the stages of man's spiritual development. Dualism (Dvaita) qualified non-dualism (Viśiṣṭādvaita) and monism (advaita) are the three main stages of spiritual development of man and different schools of Vedanta like those of Madhva, Ramanuja, Vallabha, Sankara etc., represent different views of thought. But all these are based on the Upaniṣads but became different schools of Vedānta.

The different schools of Vedānta continued to hold a sway over the vast majority of Indian people for centuries together. This is due to the new interpretation and evaluation and fresh thoughts of various sages like Sankara, Ramanuja and a host of others like Ramakrishna and his disciple Vivekananda. Now let us examine the Advaita Vedānta of Sankara before diving deep into that of Ramakrishna and Vivekananda.

From the stand point of Sankara, Brahman is the ultimate reality and only reality. The knowledge of Brahman alone is the sole aim of the sādḥaka. Brahman is a nondual reality, which has no qualities and is devoid of both external and internal distinctions. There is no other reality, both external and internal apart from Brahman. It is described as Consciousness, Reality and Infinite (Satyam, Jñānam, Anantam) as Existence, Consciousness and Bliss (Sath, Chit, Ananda). But in the transcendental plane Brahman cannot be described and is therefore characterless (Ānirvachānīya). The description Brahman as Infinite, Real, Consciousness or as Real, Conscious, Bliss cannot directly convey the reality of Brahman by denying it of finiteness, un reality, unconsciousness and blisslessness. Thus any attempt to describe Brahman is only negative, like it is not this, not this (Nethi, Nethi) and thus dissociating it from all qualities and characters.

According to Sankara, Brahman can be described as the cause, the creator, the sustainer, the destroyer of the world from the lower level of understanding and practical experience of life. Then Brahman is omnipotent and omniscient Being. In such case he possesses all qualities (saguna). In this respect he may be called Saguna Brahman or Īśvara in Sankara's philosophy of Advaita. In this stage of understanding He is an object of worship.

The world is an illusory appearance which is created by Brahman through his power of *māyā*. This power of *māyā* of Brahman is not distinguishable from Him just like the burning power of fire is from the fire alone. Brahman with his magical power creates a world-show with all wonderful objects and we in our ignorance (*Ajñāna* and *Āvidhyā*) are deceived by this world of objects. But Brahman is not affected- or deceived by this *māyā* just like the magician is not deceived by his magical show. We, the ignorant people see many objects through our ignorance (*ajñāna*) instead of seeing the only Brahman. This *māyā* is called *avidyā*. But the wise people see only the Brahman. They are not deceived by the world show or the illusion producing *māyā*. For the wise men, Brahman is not the wielder of *māyā*. Thus the description of Brahman as the creator, sustainer and destroyer does not enable us to understand Its' essence (*Svarūpalakṣaṇa*) but it is the description of only the accidental (*tatasthalakṣaṇa*). At this lower level of experience the ignorant people will not be able to understand the essence of Brahman.

In Advaita philosophy of Sankara the world is a false appearance (*mithya*) conjured up by *maya* and perceived by us on account of our ignorance. As far as this ignorance is concerned, it is a positive principle (*bhavarūpa*) and to the extent it conceals the reality of Brahman from our view (*āvaraṇa*). We are forced to see a world of many objects (*vikṣepa*). But the world has no place in the absolute reality (i.e.) Brahman. This cannot be a part nor an aspect or even a manifestation of Brahman. Its existence is only apparent even though it is sustained by Brahman. Though it exists nowhere except in Brahman it does not stand as a quality, adjective about an appearance in Brahman. The relationship between Brahman and world is neither positive nor negative but only apparent. To be plain there is no relation at all

But the existence of the world is only empirical and it is perceived out of our ignorance. Brahman is present every where in the world but we are not able to perceive Him. On the other hand we perceive a world with many material things, bodies and minds and also employ names and forms (nāma-rūpa). Thus according to Sankara the world never exists in Brahman. So the status of the world is purely metaphysical in Sankara's Advaita.

The Relationship of Jīva with Brahman

According to Sankara the soul (Jīva) is totally identical with Brahman. Though man is composed of the body and the self, the body like any other material object is an illusory appearance. Thus when this reality is realised, then the self remains and also it is nothing other than Brahman. The upanishadic saying 'tat tvam asi' is to be understood clearly in this context. Here the word 'tat' means the reality beyond the world which is also pure consciousness that forms the essence of Brahman. The word 'tvam' means pure consciousness underlying man. According to upanishadic seers a total identity exists between these two. The soul being identical with Brahman it is no other reality than what Brahman really is. The supreme Brahman is the self-luminous infinite and consciousness. Sankara says: "As the one fire entering into the universe expresses itself in various forms, even so that one soul is expressing itself in every soul and yet is infinitely more besides."¹ Due to the association with the body, the self appears limited, finite because of ignorance. Due to the beginningless (anādi) ignorance we think that the self is in bondage forgetting that it is really Brahman and we assume that the self behaves like finite, limited, miserable being which runs after transitory

1. Quoted from Swami Vivekananda, Jñāna Yoga; p. 130.

world objects. When worldly desires are fulfilled one feels that he is pleased and sorry to loose them. When this relationship of body with the self is not properly understood we suffer from the ego or 'I' ness. But in reality the self is neither the body nor the mind nor the ego. We will discern the true nature of the self when it is dissociated from the body. The self in reality is not a finite, miserable being. It is free from all worries that arise due to the desires of material objects. This self in its essence is unlimited consciousness and bliss. Unless this kind of relationship between the body and the self is not understood properly due to the ignorance, we cannot attain liberation. Liberation is to be attained through the true knowledge of the self as non-different with Brahman. The only course for achieving this is the proper study of the Vedānta and meditation on the truths contained in it. This clear realization of the truth that the self is Brahman (Thannthvam Asi) and in the form "I am Brahman" alone confers man with salvation other courses like performing of rituals, worshipping God and offerings to God at the most may purify our mind and direct and focuss our concentration to know Brahman. This itself does not give us liberation. The liberation is possible only through the knowledge of the self or the Brahman. Even after knowing Brahman the self may be associated with the body due to the past 'karmas' that begun to yield fruits (Prarabdha karma). Thus the liberated soul is neither deceived nor identified with the body. So he is not affected by world's miseries. Such a man though he is in the world yet he is out of it. That man who has attained this state is called the 'jivan mukta'. This state of positive Bliss (ānanda) that Brahman is bliss and liberation as an identity of Brahman is the summum bonum of Sankara's Advaita.

Ramakrishna and his influence on Vivekananda

Though the fundamental principles of Vivekananda's philosophy of Neo-Vedanta are to be traced to the Vedas and the Upanisads, yet it is an underlying fact and absolute reality that Vivekananda's Neo-vedanta owes its origin, development, evolution and formulation to his great Guru Sri Ramakrishna. This is directly proclaimed by Swamiji himself. "Now all the ideas that I preach are only an attempt to echo his voice"¹ If there has been anything achieved by me, by thoughts, or words, or deeds, if from my lips has ever fallen one word that has helped any one in the world, I lay no claim to it, it was his. But if there have been curses falling from my lips, if there has been hatred coming out of me, it is all mine and not his. All that has been weak has been mine, and all that has life giving, strengthening, pure, and holy, has been his inspiration, his words, and he himself — yes, my friends, the world has yet to know that man. We read in the history of the world about prophets and their lives, and these come down to us through centuries of writings and workings by their disciples. Thorough thousands of years of chiselling and modelling the lives of the great prophets of Yore come down to us; and yet, in my opinion, not one stands so high in brilliance as that life which I saw with my own eyes, under whose shadow I have lived, at whose feet I have learnt everything — the life of Ramakrishna Paramahansa."²

Sri Ramakrishna had a profound influence on Vivekananda and the above words of Vivekananda is clear testimony that Vivekananda owes everything to his Guru Ramakrishna. It was he (Ramakrishna) who synthesised his

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1. The Complete works of Swamy Vivekananda, Vol. VIII, p. 79.
 2. Ibid. Vol. III, 312 – 313.

Philosophy due to the multi-faceted spiritual experience and realizations. He tried to find out the ultimate reality by adopting numerous paths and varied experiences. Though these experiences may differ yet they are to relate the same reality. So Ramakrishna thought and was convinced that reality has many aspects, forms and characters. This same truth has been said even in the Rgvedic verse which says "The one reality is called by the wise in different ways".¹ It was Ramakrishna's cherished goal to bring about a reconciliation in his contemporary age in which the world was torn by conflicts of creeds and doctrines, theologies and philosophies and relationship between any two religions or communities was marked by intolerance, jealousy and contempt of each other. It is appropriate here to touch some of the salient points of Ramakrishna's philosophy on which the Vivekananda's philosophy was developed.

Ramakrishna's Concept of Brahman

Ramakrishna thinks that Brahman and Śakti or Kālī are not two separate realities. On the other hand they are only two aspects of the same reality or two states of the same thing. So they are non-different (abheda) Ramakrishna gave equal importance to the Śakti aspect of Brahman. He thinks that Brahman is the absolute in one aspect and is indeterminate and impersonal being (nirguna) This is in agreement with the Advaitin's concept. In another aspect Brahman is determinate and personal God (Saguṇa) This line of Thinking is in perfect agreement with that of Viśiṣṭādvaitin and dvaitin. This implies that personal God is not an illusory appearance, whereas the ultimate reality is indeterminate and qualityless. But it appears determinate and qualified, due to the association of māyā or ignorance (avidyā or ajñāna).

1. Ekam and Viprā bahudhā vadanti.

The same reality of Brahman appears as nameless or formless Brahman for a man endowed with spiritual insight (jñāni), whereas for a Yogin it is Atman and for a devotee (Bhakta) he is the Bhagavan or a personal God. According to Ramakrishna, the worship of forms of God has the same value and importance with the worship of the formless Brahman. But it depends upon the wisdom of a person. He speaks of seven Psychic centres (from Mūlādhāra to Sahasra) in the human body and seven levels of conscious connected with those centres. He argues that we have the experience of God when the mind rises to the 6th level. But when it goes further to the seventh level it is also absorbed in Samādhi, a state of pure consciousness in which Brahman as 'Existence Consciousness - Bliss' (sat cit ānanda) is completely united with Śakti. At this state the mind does not perceive any form or any object and there is a complete dissolution of the whole world of objects in the ultimate reality. To realise Brahman a negative path of withdrawal from this world is advocated by Ramakrishna. But when final realization takes place we find a Brahman everywhere. The negation of the world is succeeded by the affirmation of new light in the life of a wise man (Jñāni).

Ramakrishna thinks that Brahman as the divine mother has manifested in different forms like earth, heaven, moon, the sun, temple, garden etc. They are verily so many forms and manifestations of the divine mother. All are Brahman and illuminate with divine consciousness (cit). The unique realization of Ramakrishna is that all this is Brahman (sarvam khalividam brahma).

CHAPTER - III

VIVEKANANDA'S CONCEPT OF NEO - VEDANTA

Neo-Vedanta is a new coinage used often in a loose way with different connotations. Vedānta, as we have already pointed out in the beginning of this discussion stands for the thoughts of the Upaniṣads. The Neo-vedanta connotes a new interpretation of the Vedānta philosophy in the modern times. Vivekananda and Radhakrishnan can be taken as the faithful representatives of Neo-Vedanta. Others have modified, mixed up or compromised the Vedānta philosophy with other schools. They are all independent view points only. Earlier the Sikh tradition and the Religious philosophies of saints of North India like Kabir panth and Radhaswami school represent an independent thinking and the new system of religious philosophy. This should be clearly understood while describing the evolution of religio-philosophical thinking of modern India. The Neo-vedanta is not to be understood as the traditional Advaita of Sankaracarya, but it may also be Advaita to the extent it holds that the Brahman is the ultimate reality without a second (Ekamevā dvitīyam). It goes to the credit of Vivekananda to give a new interpretation of Vedānta that suits to all times. He made it as the ideal and also as the basis for all walks of life.

Concept of Brahman

Now we will briefly analyse his concept of Brahman. In Vivekananda's philosophy Brahman is infinite existence, infinite knowledge and infinite bliss (*sat-cit-ānanda*). It is the ultimate reality and the only reality. It is without a name, without a form (*nāmā, rūpā*). It is beyond space, time and causation. It is one without a second (*ekam eva advitīyam brahma*). This is what is meant when he affirms: "There is neither nature nor God nor the universe, only that one infinite existence, out of which, through name and form, all these are manifested."¹ He argues that the entire universe is the reflection of that one eternal being, which is screened by *māyā* in the form of space, time, and causation. This universe has no relationship whatsoever with Brahman. These are only reflections of our mind and this appears different with names and forms. We, due to the influence of *māyā* are creating these images of objects upon the one existence which is devoid of forms and names. So he declares "All these heavens, all these places are vain imaginations of the mind. They do not exist, never existed in the past, and never will exist in the future"² This world is but a dream, and this dream will vanish when one wakes up and becomes free from *māyā*.³ 'In Him is *māyā*, dreaming all this dream'⁴

The above analysis of the views of Vivekananda enables us to conclude that Brahman is indeterminate, impersonal Being without qualities and distinctions, without any relationship with worldly objects. Thus Swamy Vivekananda's Brahman is perfectly formless, qualityless and distinctionless

1. Swamy Vivekananda, *Jnana Yoga*, p. 301.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 302.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 254.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 111.

(nirguna and nirviśeṣa). This line of thinking of Vivekananda is in perfect harmony with that of Sankara. There is no difference on this point between them. But this is not a complete and total estimation of Swamy Vivekananda's concept of Brahman. This will be indicated by the following discussions of his complete concept of Brahman.

In Swamy Vivekananda's philosophy there are two movements, a negative and positive. It is the same traditional negative movement by which others have approached to the description of Brahman by the path of negation, that Vivekananda also advocated. But he also shows a positive path in addition to negative path with a new light and with a new meaning. Vivekananda declares, to understand Brahman, "We have to give up ignorance and all that is false; and then truth will begin to reveal itself to us. When we have grasped the truth, things which we gave up at first will take new shape and form, will appear to us in a new light, and become deified..."¹ Thus we have to understand that according to Swami Vivekananda the world of object is not totally negated in Brahman, as is done in Sankara's Advaita (*brahma satyam jagan mithyā*). Thus in Vivekananda's vedantic thought the world in a sense, is real.

Concept of World

Vivekananda gives altogether a different and practical concept of the world. In his spiritual thought, he does not denounce the world. On the other hand he preaches the deification rather than its annihilation. He asks us to give up the world as we ordinarily perceive it and to know what it really is.

1. R C. Majundar; Swamy Vivekananda Centenary Memorial Volume: p. 269.

He says "Deify it, it is God alone."¹ To substantiate his theory he quotes the opening verse of the *Īśāvāsyaopaniṣad* which says : "Whatever exists in this universe, is to be covered with the Lord."² He is not for a cessation of all the worldly activities. But he advocates to see the Lord in each and every activity. So he says "the whole world is full of the lord, open your eyes and see him. This is what Vedānta teaches "³ He is for the continuation of all the world activity, but he gives a vedantic way and the vedantic attitude for our activity in this world. He says that we have to work by seeing God everywhere. Thus by working we have to find out a way out. At the same time he is against the idea of indulging in all types of worldly luxuries without knowing the ultimate truth and goal. He is also against the idea of cursing the world and going to forest and end one's own life by harsh methods like starvation, making his heart a barren and killing one's own feelings. On these two extremes he remarks, "Both have lost the way, both have missed the Goal."⁴ This thought of Vivekananda, it seems, has arisen from the inspiration of his Guru when he said "Do whatever you like with the knowledge of the non-dual Brahman tied up in a corner of your cloth "⁵

Now we will discuss Vivekananda's concept of world in relation to Brahman. He argues that the great absolute "has become the universe by coming through space, time and causation, which are like the glass through which the Absolute is seen; and when It is seen on the lower side, it appears as the universe."⁶ He points out that time, space and causation

1. Swamy Vivekananda Centenary Memorial Volume : p. 269.

2. Ibid., 270.

3. Swami Vivekananda: Jnana Yoga, pp. 140-141.

4. Ibid., p. 146.

5. Vivekananda Centenary Memorial Volume : p. 270.

6. Swamy Vivekananda, Jnana Yoga, p. 115.

have no real existence. Yet they are not non-existent since all things are manifesting only through them. He gives an example of the wave of the ocean. Though the wave is a temporary making of the ocean yet its form can be recognised for a short while. But the ocean is permanent. Thus the Absolute, manifesting it self as many just like the ocean, through the veil of time, space and causation is eternal one. To substantiate his views further he quotes upanishadic passage which says "As the one fire entering into the universe expresses itself in various forms, even so that one soul is expressing Itself in every soul and yet is infinitely more besides"¹ Thus Swami Vivekananda. It seems, oscillates between two different concepts of Brahman. It seems that Vivekananda does not go to the extent of Ramakrishna and accept, that all this is verily Brahman. But an examination of Swami's thoughts in different places also enable us to conclude that he also holds that all this is verily Brahman like his Guru Ramakrishna. For example we may quote this passage "we now see that all the various forms of cosmic energy, such as matter, thought, force, intelligence, and so forth are simply the manifestations of that cosmic intelligence, or the supreme Lord. Everything that you see, feel, or hear, the whole universe, is His creation; or to be a little more accurate, is His projection. or to be still more accurate, is the Lord himself"²

Just like Ramakrishna, Vivekananda also holds that Brahman and Śakti are non-different (abheda). His view of the unchangeable substance of the universe is the same as Brahman and the world phenomena are nothing but the play of energies, powers and forces of Śakti. To this extent, in the opinion of Vivekananda, the universe is a real manifestation of Brahman.

1. Swamy Vivekananda, Jnana Yoga, p. 130.

2. Ibid., p. 241.

But at some other places he speaks that the universe is an apparent manifestation of Brahman, its reflection being space time and causation which make up *māyā*. Thus we see a contradiction in Vivekananda's conception of Brahman and the world. It is left for the future philosophers to find out a way out of these contradictory ideas of this great luminary - Vivekananda.

Vivekananda's Neo-Vedanta as a Reconciliation of Advaita, Dvaita and Viśiṣṭādvaita

Swamy Vivekananda never denies but gives due recognition to all the three schools of Vedānta - Advaita, Dvaita and Viśiṣṭādvaita, because he considers them of different stand points of knowledge and at different levels of Human experience. They are all true to him as the descriptions of Brahman based on genuine human experience. In Advaita, Brahman is described as having neither quality, nor form (Nirguna). He is indeterminate and impersonal. He is neither a creator nor a sustainer nor a destroyer of the world nor omnipotent nor omniscient. As opposed to this view in Dvaita and Viśiṣṭādvaita, Brahman is spoken of as having all qualities and forms (Saguna). He is personal, omnipotent and omniscient creator and destroyer of the world.

Now let us examine briefly what Advaita, Dvaita and Viśiṣṭādvaita men. In Advaita the world is a result of *māyā*, an illusory creation of God with His magical power. The Individual self is unreal. The real self of the man is the *Ātman*, the ever pure, free, infinite and immortal. It is the same *sat, cit, ānanda* that Brahman is. As such it is Brahman alone. The association of the self with that of the body due to the ignorance is the real cause of bondage. So, for a man to

attain liberation, he must have the true knowledge of the self as identical with Brahman. This can not be achieved by performing rituals or through devotion to God. In Dvaita and Viśiṣṭādvaita the world is real creation of Brahman due to his wonderful and creative power. So the world is as real as Brahman. The Individual self in these two schools is limited, finite being, though it is conscious and external. Thus the individual soul is dependent on Brahman. When it identifies itself with the body and forgets god due to the influence of ignorance, it comes under bondage. To attain mokṣa it is not sufficient to have the knowledge of God, the self and the world. What we must have is true knowledge of them. In addition to that, by constant devotion to God we must obtain his grace. It is God's grace alone that liberates man from bondage. So in Dvaita and Viśiṣṭādvaita the devotion combined with Jñāna and Karma is the path way of liberation.

Further, here, we will analyse how the Neo-vedantism of Swamy Vivekananda is a reconciliation of Advaita, Dvaita and Viśiṣṭādvaita. Vivekananda argues that God is both personal and impersonal. Man, as soul is infinite and impersonal. But with the association of the body he is a finite person. Swamiji says "The 'Impersonal' is a living God, a principle. The difference between personal and impersonal is this, that the personal is only a man, and the impersonal idea is that He is angel, the man, the animal and yet something more, because Impersonality includes all personalities, the some total of everything in the universe and infinitely more besides."¹ So the Advaita of Vivekananda is friendly and not antagonistic to Dvaita and Viśiṣṭādvaita. These two are accepted by him 'not in a patronising way, but with the conviction that they are true manifestations of the same truth, and that they all lead to

1. Swamy Vivekananda, Practical Vedanta, p. 50

the same conclusions as the Advaita has reached.¹ He pleads for the acceptance of the even contradictory ideas found in these two schools because they all relate to the same great universal truth. Thus the schools of Advaita, Dvaita and Viśiṣṭādvaita and other types of philosophy are descriptions of the same reality. They are equally true as various grades and types of human experiences. Hence Vivekananda agrees for giving equal importance and due recognition. So he advocates that any philosophy to satisfy and serve the needs of various grades of human minds must be comprehensive and assimilate different standpoints of view in it. This is what is meant by the term Neo-vedānta in the view of Vivekananda. He accepts and reconciles Advaita, Dvaita and other systems as different stand points of knowledge at different levels of human experience and commends for acceptance as a synthesis of different views is the corner stone if we want to visualize a full view of anything. Though the views may be contrary and even contradictory yet, they are not to be rejected as false, because they have originated from genuine human experience. The Brahman of Advaita is based on *nirvikalpa samādhi* wherein there is only pure consciousness, but no individual consciousness relating to any particular object. In this *nirvikalpa jñāna* there is negation of all objects including the subject of consciousness. Here pure conscious alone remains which is identical with pure existence. According to this Jñāna, the ultimate reality or Brahman is impersonal existence - consciousness. This is also the eternal peace or bliss. Here, there is no existence of the world of objects. As opposed to Advaita concept of Brahman the Dvaitin's concept of Brahman is based on *Savikalpasamādhi*. Here one will be having the knowledge of the consciousness of the subject and also the consciousness of object. In *Savikalpa jñāna* there

1. Swamy Vivekananda, *Practical Vedānta*, p. 96.

is an affirmation of both subject and object as related to each other. So in this Brahman is a subject related to worldly objects which are real and he is a personal being and the re-creator of real world of innumerable things and beings. Vivekananda argues that both these views of Brahman must be accepted as true of Brahman, the ultimate reality, because they are based on genuine spiritual experience. Due to the fresh interpretations given by succeeding sages and saints, these two schools may give rise to scope for further contrary and contradictory ideas. Sometimes they may speak in the language of Advaita at other times they may speak in the language of Dvaita. This may be the answer to some of the contradictions and apparent inconsistencies among these sages and also the inconsistencies and contradictions of our luminary - Vivekananda.

Swamy Vivekananda tries to bring a harmony among the different paths of liberation in his Neo - Vedanta. This is emphasised by him when he says "The Vedantist gives no other attributes to God except these three that He is Infinite existence, Infinite Knowledge and Infinite Bliss, and he regards these three as one - Existence without knowledge and love, cannot be, knowledge without love, and love without knowledge cannot be. What want is the harmony of Existence, knowledge and Bliss Infinite"¹ He advocates a synthesis of knowledge and love and work which will lead to an ideal spiritual firm. He wants a harmony of these three and argues that it is possible to have the intellect of Sankara with the heart of Buddha. He emphatically asserts that the moving universal principle is love. He says "The motive power of the whole universe is that one wonderful thing, unselfishness, renunciation, love, the real, the only living force existence"²

1. Swamy Vivekananda, Juana Yoga, p. 135.

2. Swamy Vivekananda, Practical Vedanta, p. 109.

He is against to give importance to any school to the detriment of the other. He is for recognising the value of all paths that lead to the goal of liberation. Because every one appeals to some sections of spiritual beings. He advocates for the proper use of knowledge combined with reason and also worldly activity is a must for us because we have will and energy to accomplish. He argues that love of God and man is also equally necessary with that of knowledge or work for the satisfaction of our heart and also our life of feeling and emotion.

Swamy Vivekananda's Reconciliation of Jñāna, Karma, Bhakti and Yoga :

In his Neo-vedanta Swamy Vivekananda combines Jñāna, Karma, Bhakti and Yoga. He pleads for a religion that will be equally acceptable to all minds, equally philosophic, equally emotional and equally conducive to action. He desired much that these fundamental feelings should be arose in every man, he declared "all men were so constituted that in their minds all these elements of philosophy, mysticism, emotion, and of work were equally present in full"¹

His ideal religion is a harmonious blending and balance of these four principles. This is what is called Yoga in Indian philosophical terminology. He says in his Jñāna Yoga 'to the worker, it is union between men and the whole of humanity, to the mystic, between his lower and higher self, to the lower, union between himself and the God of love, and to the philosopher, it is the union of all existence. This is what is meant by Yoga. And the man who seeks after this kind of union is called a Yogin.'² Vivekananda's cherished aim is that

1. Swamy Vivekananda, Jnana Yoga, p. 408.

2. Ibid, p. 409.

every one of us should become a yogin. Here it seems that it echoes the same words of Sri Krishna in the *Bhagavad Gītā*. Thus we see that his Neo-Vedanta is a synthesis and a practical reconciliation and a comprehensive system where in different paths of liberation are harmoniously blended together. He wants an integrated cultivation of all these paths so as to evolve an ideal religion which will enable us to reach the final goal of liberation. But on some other occasion also he hints that if one follows sincerely any one of these paths to its logical conclusion then one may attain his goal of liberation. This is what he means when he says, "Do this either by work, or worship, or psychic control or philosophy, by one or more, or all of these and be free."¹

Now we shall examine the basic principles underlying in the Neo-vedanta of Vivekananda. Vivekananda gives an illuminating definition of Neo-vedantist who is expected to overcome all types of barriers. He says: "When a man has reached the highest stage when he sees difference between neither man nor woman, neither sect nor creed, nor colour nor birth, nor any of these differentiations, but goes beyond and finds that divinity which is the reality behind every human being, then alone he will reach the universal brotherhood, and that man alone is a Vedantist"² Thus Vivekananda had a new and ever fresh view of Vedānta. He made it an ideal and basis for all walks of life. In this connection he says that if the ideal is higher, the greater will be individual and society. "I will ask you to understand that Vedānta, though it is intensely practical is always so in the sense of the ideal. It does not preach an impossible ideal, however high it be, and it is high enough

1. Quoted by Swamy Vivekananda, *Raja Yoga*, p. 1.

2. The Complete works of Swamy Vivekananda, Vol. I. pp. 391

for an ideal.”² This Vedānta is for bringing a reconciliation of the actual to the ideal and stands for ushering in moral values, truth, social harmony and universal oneness in the Society. At the same time it inculcates the spirit of selfless service and mutual understanding followed by the co-operation among the members of the society. It also confers individuals with freedom and equality. As it advocates higher ideals of social life in a way it perfects social system. In this connection he says “Vedanta offers exalted principles for the reconstruction of society.”¹ So Vivekananda strongly pleaded for the following fundamental principles for the regeneration of society.

1. Harmony between Individual and social life.
2. Freedom of each Individual and Nation.
3. Human equality.
4. Human unity.

(1) Social Harmony :

Vivekananda's concept of Neo-Vedanta is for bringing in the principle of unity among the fellow members of the society. This unity necessitates the interdependence of life. Life is not solitary but social and spiritual. So the individual life is inseparable from social life. This interdependence of life should eliminate mutual hatred and friction and social differences.

His Vedānta is for the promotion of better social relationship through the mutual service and identity and it advocates for the abolition of difference between the individual and

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1. The Complete works of Swamy Vivekananda, Vol II, p. 294.
 2. Malhotra; S L Social and Political orientations of Neo-vedantism, S Chand & Co, Calcutta, 1970. p. 164.

society. Thus it promotes mutual good which is based on equality of rights and opportunity. In other words he is for resolving the conflict not only between *pāramārtha* and *vyāvahāra* but also between individual and society. He believes that human relations can be made divine. He sees no difference between the individual and society. The aims of both are the same, mutual growth, harmony and perfection. Service to society, in his view, automatically ensures individual growth. So he declares "If the many and the one are the same reality, then not only all forms of worship, but also all kinds of work are paths to realisation. There need not be made any distinction between sacred and secular work."¹ The Individual who is an obstacle in such an individual's growth, but the progress of the society is aware of the reality of unity of life never negates social interests. Society also never stands in the way of an individual. Society and individual is possible only when there is freedom.

2) Individual freedom :

The concept of freedom of Vivekananda is inseparably associated with the concept of Individual. He asserts that man is divine and that divinity is the natural and inherent birth right of the Individual. In his opinion this right of divinity includes all other rights like right to freedom and equality. To him freedom, truth, and God are totally identical and not separate entities. He thinks that freedom is same as god and it was absolute, indivisible and all inclusive. In his view material freedom without spiritual freedom is waste as the former fulfils the later.

3) Human equality :

He accepts and recognises not only the right to freedom of individual but also right to equality. He points out that as

1. K D Seth, "The Educational Philosophy of Swamy Vivekananda", *Prabhudda Bharta*, November, 1961, p. 466

all individuals are parts of the absolute, they are all equal. Freedom has no meaning without equality. So he says "No man and nation can attempt to gain physical freedom without physical equality, nor mental freedom without mental equality."¹ Thus it is clear that he is for the abolition of all privileges as they perpetuate inequalities in the society. He visualised a society wherein there is no place for inequalities and social disparities. Like any other social reformer, he wanted the downtrodden and poor to rise to the level of higher ups in the society.

4) Internationalism :

His concept of equality ensures the unity of all human beings. He declares "We are one-mentally, physically and spiritually. It is wrong to say we are even physically different."² Human equality fosters human brotherhood. He desired that the universal brotherhood should merge in universal selfhood. So he says "Brotherhood should be superseded by universal selfhood."³ He is against the perpetuation of national inequalities and privileges as they are detrimental to international unity. He strongly pleaded for the abolition of privileges and barriers, racial, or social or national. He wanted the people to realise the fertility of them and the necessity of international unity as the goal of humanity. Thus we see the influence of his Guru Ramakrishna in His Neo-vedanta.

We have examined the guiding principles of Neo-Vedanta of Vivekananda. His Vedanta is for bringing in drastic changes in society and ushering in moral, political,

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1. The complete works of Swamy Vivekananda, Vol. IV, Advaita Ashram, Calcutta, 1962, p. 328.
 2. Ibid., Vol. VI. 1963, p. 122.
 3. The Complete works of Swamy Vivekananda, Vol I. p 373.

cultural and social revolution. Though Ramakrishna was a founder of this philosophy it was Vivekananda who built its superstructure. They wanted to emphasise the practical nature of Vedānta. 'Neo-Vedanta is a re-establishment and restatement, reconstruction and renarration, reorientation and reinterpretation of Advaita Vedanta of Sankara with modern arguments, in modern language suited to modern man, adjusting it self with all the modern challenges.'¹ Thus Vivekananda wanted his philosophy to be practical and useful to everyone in the society. But the important question is that how an abstract philosophy like that of Vivekananda can have a practical application. To support that Vedānta should be practical, he quotes historical facts which strengthen the view that it was practical even in the past. He argues that the Vedānta had emanated not from the persons who were residing in the forests leading a secluded life but from the persons who were busy in everyday affairs of life. There is one more historical testimony in that the Bhagavad Gītā, the quintessence of vedānta philosophy, was taught to Arjuna by Sri Krishna not in any isolated place but in the battle-field of Kurukshetra. Here, in Gītā what is preached is not inactivity or cessation of practical activity, but incessant activity in a calm and dispassionate way. So Vivekananda argues what we want is activity without passion and balance of mind and detachment from all types of passions. We should not press the ideal to the extreme ends. And we should see that our ordinary life conforms to the ideal and elevate it to the level of the ideal, Thus he remarks : "the actual should be reconciled to the ideal, the present life should be made to coincide with life eternal."² So he argues that it is wrong to say that we live two lives, one religious and the other worldly

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1. I. P. Mishra, "Main Characteristics of Neo-Vedantic Movement, Prabuddha, Bharata, January, 1971, p 14
 2. Swami Vivekananda Practical Vedanta, p 11

He asks us to see the same life in every being. Thus his central ideal of Vedānta is oneness. There are no two lives in anything. There is but one life, one world, one existence, everything is that one, the difference is in degree and not in kind.”¹ He wants every human-being to love and respect others, but not to look down with contempt and help others to reach their goal but never create obstacles in their way to reach the goal. “The Vedānta can be carried into our everyday life, the city life, the country life, the national life, and the home life of every nation.”² In his view a religion which cannot be practised and cannot help others is of no use and value. When viewed in this way his Vedānta is practical. His Vedānta enables us to know ourselves and develops faith in ourselves. His Vedānta teaches us to believe in ourselves and develops faith. This faith is not selfish, limited but universal and develops love in us which ultimately helps us to love one and all. This noble thoughts of Vivekananda are most practical, feasible. It is not for knowing the material objects which are objects of change and fluctuations but to know the self in us which is abiding and constant consciousness though it undergoes all changes in our body and mind but never involves in these changes and stands above them. It is the pure, immutable, unflickering light of consciousness in us which is also pure existence and free and blissful. When we realise that we are sat-cit-ananda and not the miserable beings there comes a total transformation in our life and our activities. Vivekananda argues that such a thinking rises you to the vedantic ideal and becomes a matter of practical life. He appeals to see God in every one of us and worship that God and develop service mindedness. In this connection he says, “He who sees Śiva in the poor, in the

1. Swamy Vivekananda, Practical Vedānta, p. 11.

2 Ibid., p 17.

weak, and in the diseased, really worships Siva, and if he sees Siva only in the image, his worship is but preliminary.”¹ Another positive feature of his Neo-Vedanta is that we see God in everything and as everything which will help us to realise our goal and help others to reach their goal. When we see God in ourselves we will become Gods and help others also to be gods. Another significant feature of Neo-Vedanta is not only to tolerate but accept other forms of worship. Thus Neo-Vedanta of Swamy Vivekananda respects all other religions of the world as different paths for the realisation of the God. He wants us to give the same importance to means and ends to attain our goal.

The above discussion of the salient features of Vivekananda's Neo-Vedanta throws abundant light and provide sufficient evidence that his Vedānta is practical Vedānta, a living Vedānta. It is the Vedānta that inspires individual life, ordinary life, social life, national and international life. Swamy Vivekananda wants us to take this Vedānta to every doorstep of every one. With the same purpose and aim the Ramakrishna mission has been established to spread this clarion call of Vivekananda.

1. Thus spoke Vivekananda, p 42.

CHAPTER - IV

VIVEKANANDA'S MISSION OF VEDANTA PROPAGATION WITHIN INDIA AND ABROAD

After the demise of Sri Ramakrishna, his beloved student Vivekananda focussed his attention on the organisation of his brother disciples into a powerful and dynamic spiritual fraternity dedicated to the service of humanity. Till then all his brother monks used to lead a life of meditation and secluded monasticism, keeping with the traditional spiritual ideas of India's monastic order and were not ready to take any part in any kind of social activity either humanitarian or other wise as this type of activity, according to them, causes attachment which in turn will lead to the cycle of births and deaths. Having realised this type of attitude in his brother disciples Swamiji wanted to bring a dynamic change in their attitude and in this process he undertook a responsible task of converting them to follow his new approach of social service which was very essential requirement to the spiritual gain of the monks. In this connection Swamiji remarks : "Though it was extremely painful for the Gurubhais, all of a sudden to get above their orthodox prejudices, their religious individualism and their habit of free life of peaceful meditation, still they could not ignore or set a side as mere bunkum the rational and convincing

interpretation of an ideal monastic life which they must hold before the society for their own good as well as for the well being of the humanity at large.”¹

Vivekananda emphasised that the ancient cloistered monasticism, which in India was concerned primarily with personal liberation, must receive a new orientation at the hands of the disciples of Sri Ramakrishna. An Institution must not be allowed to remain altogether cut off from the happiness and sorrows, the hopes and aspirations of the people at large. On the other hand it should be made as an instrument of liberation, both individual and collective. According to the Swamy, the order must represent a synthesis of renunciation and service. In addition to the preaching of spirit of moral discipline, contemplation and study it also taught a life of self-dedication at the altar of humanity for the attainment of the highest goal of human existence.

Vivekananda's emotional and rational appeal to the intelligence of his Gurubhaisna's to move with the spirit of the time and to create a new order of monks in India, who would dedicate their lives to help and save other souls as well. Ultimately they responded to his leader Vivekananda with all humanity and respect. They had profound faith in their leader Vivekananda and they knew his voice to be the voice of their master. All Gurubhais followed him in the field of philanthropic service, and were prepared to go any where in obedience to the Swamiji. This is one of the greatest triumphs Swamy Vivekananda achieved at the initial stage of his manifold activities in India. There is no wonder when it is said: “But the victory was never in doubt: it was a foregone conclusion not only on account of the immense ascendancy of the young

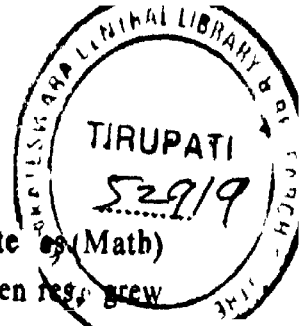
1. R.C. Majumdar, (ed) Vivekananda Centenary Memorial Volume, p. 128

conqueror, the superiority of his genius and the prestige of India's acclamation, but on account of the love his brethren bore him and that Ramakrishna had shown for him. He was the master's anointed."¹

The Gurubhais got reconciled to the new interpretation of Sri Ramakrishna's teachings. They did not object the European disciples of Swamiji embracing their community. Immediately, Swamy Vivekananda who had been engaged in the ceremonial worship of the master for twelve years since the inauguration of this new monastic order, and who did not leave the disciples of the math for a single day, went to Madras to start an Ashrama to spread the message of the master and interpret the truths of the Vedānta in Southern India in the light of the life and teachings of Sri Ramakrishna. Swamy Saradananda and Swamy Abhedananda already went to the west and started the propagation in America and England. Swamy Akhailananda, one of the disciples, had travelled on foot to Tibet and the inaccessible Himalayan for many years. He worked round the clock for educating the poor and helpless masses in Rajasthan. Then he proceeded to carry on relief work in the famine-stricken area in the district of Murshidabad in Bengal and started at Mahula an orphanage to provide education to the poor children without any reservation of caste or creed.

Swamy Trigunātītānanda opened a famine centre at Dinajpur. The other disciples of the Swamy also kept themselves ready to take up social work whenever and wherever necessary. Moreover many being inspired by Swamiji's lofty ideal of renunciation and service joined the order and stood by him to serve the poor in a spirit of worship of the divine and to preach the cardinal teachings of the scriptures to one and all, without distinction for their material and spiritual welfare.

1. Life of Swamy Vivekananda, Mayavathi Memorial Edition, Vol. I, pp 129-130



Within a short period of time, various monasteries (Math) centres), homes of service (sevaśramās), relief centres grew up in various places with the hearty co-operation of disciples.

Ramakrishna Mission and Math

In May, 1897, Swamy Vivekananda established a mission in honour of his master Ramakrishna Paramahansa and he for the cause of its promotion laid down his life. Not from the inception of the mission but till the end of his life, he was busy in propagating two fold activity of preaching and social work.

After the death of his master, Vivekananda started an organisation. The disciples who were admitted into this organisation led a life of monastic universal brotherhood. He went to the homes of those boys who had resumed their studies and by a great zeal of enthusiasm tried to induce them to return Baranagore. In Baranagore, the first monastery of the Ramakrishna order, was started.

In the monastery, the disciples were overpowered by the spiritual impetus of Vivekananda's songs and thrilling conversations. Gradually the young disciples gathered together and at last formed into a holy brotherhood under the able and spiritual leadership of Narendranath.

Even though the boys were in the midst of extreme privations, this miserable poverty had no terrors for them. Being very firm in their desire they followed the injunctions of master. Forgetting sleep, they spent night after night in prayer and spiritual exercise. Vivekananda always spurred them on to burning renunciation and intense devotion

These monks took it as a delight to observe the severest spiritual austerities, and they realized the empirical nature of the world. Sometimes during this period they performed the sacred Virāja ceremony and formally took the vows of life, long celibacy and poverty dedicating their lives to the realisation of God. The old names were changed for new ones to complete their severance from the old world and its associations.

Even his nirvāṇa in the cause of time did not destroy the edifice. The Ramakrishna mission has established itself and and grown. Its first President, Brahmananda, busied himself to secure it a regular constitution. The order of Sannyasins of Ramakrishna, domiciled in the Belur Math, near Calcutta, became a legal statue in A. D. 1899

The mission and math are really the two aspects, the philanthropic and the monastic of the same organisation, both controlled by the general council of the order. But the popular name, wrongly applied to the whole, is that of the Ramakrishna Mission.

Swamiji seriously thought of organising the sporadic and unsystematic spiritual and philanthropic activities of his Gurubhais and of uniting the monastic disciples into an association for giving a concrete shape to his comprehensive programme of activity, covering the major problems of Indian life, viz. liquidation of illiteracy, rural reconstruction, providing work to the labour and backward classes, economic and social uplift of the people, removal of untouchability, female education, relief works, preservation Indigenous culture, dissemination of the accumulated spiritual wisdom of the race and the evaluation of a cultural synthesis.

Aims and Objectives

The assembled members enthusiastically supported the proposal and the aims and objectives of the association and they were adopted unanimously as follows in the second meeting.

1. The Association (Sangh) shall be known as the Rama krishna Mission.
2. a) The new mission is to preach the truths which Sri Ramakrishna has preached and demonstrated by practical application in his own life, for the good of humanity and to help others to put these truths into practice in their lives for their temporal, mental and spiritual advancement.

b) To conduct the activities of the movement for the establishment of fellowship among the followers of different religions, knowing them all to be so many forms only of one undying eternal religion.
2. Its methods of action are :

a) To train men so as to make them competent to teach such knowledge or sciences as are conducive to the material and spiritual welfare of the masses,

b) To promote and encourage arts and industries.

c) To introduce and spread among the people in general vedantic and other religious ideas in the way in which they were elucidated in the life of Sri Rama-krishna.
3. It should have two branches of action:

a) Indian work department : The activities of the Indian work department should be directed to the establishment of *maths* and *ashramas* in different parts of India for the training of *sannyasins* and such of the house holders as may be willing to devote their lives to the teaching of others.

b) Foreign Department : Where its work in the foreign department should be to send trained members of the order to countries outside India to start centres there for the preaching of *Vedānta* in order to bring about a closer relation and better understanding between India and Foreign countries.

4. The aims and ideas of the mission being purely spiritual and humanitarian, it shall have no connection with politics.
5. Anyone who believes in the mission of Sri Ramakrishna or who sympathises or is willing to co-operate with the above mentioned aims and objects of the association, is eligible for membership.

After making the aims and objectives of the mission specified, the Swamy himself became the General President and made Swamy Brahmananda and Swamy Yogananda, the President and the Vice-President respectively of the Calcutta centre. For three years the Ramakrishna mission held its sittings every Sunday at the house of Balaram Basu at Baghbazar in Calcutta. ~~On~~ Once, he found one of his Gurubhais still in doubt whether the works initiated by Swamiji were in full accord with the life and teachings of Sri Ramakrishna. the Swamy was roused to an apostolic mood and culminated as follows with quivering emotion. "How do you know that these are not in keeping with his ideas ? Do you want to

shut Sri Ramakrishna, the embodiment of infinite ideas, within your own limits. I shall break these limits and scatter his ideas; broadcast all over the world. Infinite are the ideas and infinite are the paths that lead to the goal."¹ He further elucidates : Even, if one can find a limit to the knowledge of Brahman, one cannot measure the unfathomable depths of our master's mind. One gracious glance of his eyes can create a hundred thousand Vivekanandas at this instant. Thus the doubts of his Gurubhais in this regard were silenced once for all and they created by their leader with the enthusiasm dedicated themselves to humanitarian service in the name of Sri Ramakrishna.

It goes to the credit of this great Swamy that he bore down all sentimental opposition with the force of his dynamic and convincing ideas and harmonised the two apparently contradictory ideals of renunciation and service in monastic life and gave concrete shape to these divine impulses through the institution started under the name of the Ramakrishna mission for practising and preaching the eternal religion in its universal aspect.

Math

In maths or monasteries there are regular monks, who have renounced the world and have received initiation after a period of novitiate. They constantly moved from one centre to another according to the exigencies of the work, but they remain under the control of the general council of the order at Belur.

A second category of division is composed of laymen (householders), forming a kind of third estate. They are

1 R C Majumdar : Swamy Vivekananda Centenary Memorial Volume, P No. 131.

2. Ibid., p. 131

intimate disciples who come for spiritual instruction to the maths. They sometimes spend short period of retreat. The number ran into twenty thousands.

The other class of the reserve, rising to some millions, is composed of those who have partly or wholly adopted the ideals of the mission, and serve it from outside without labelling themselves as its disciples.

Mission of Centres

During the first part of April, 1926, the mission held an extraordinary general reunion at the math of Belur in order to form some idea of its full scope. About 120 institutions were represented of which half were in Bengal, a dozen in Bihar and Orissa, fourteen in the United Provinces, thirteen in the Province of Madras, one in Bombay. Outside the peninsula there were three centres in Ceylon directing nine schools where fifteen hundred children were being educated, a student centre at Jaffna and The Vivekananda Society at Colombo. In Burma there was a monastic centre with a large free Hospital

Another centre was at Singapore, there were six in the United States : at San Francisco, Lacrescenta near Las Angles, Sananton valley Portland, Bostan, New York. without reckoning the Vedanta societies of St. Louis, cincinnati, Philadelphia, Tacoma, etc. At Sao Paulo in Brazil a group of men have busied themselves since 1900 with Vivekananda's teaching.

Vivekananda said 'that the new ought to be a development rather than a condemnation and rejection of the old. The female institutions of the Ramakrishna Mission combining all that is best in Hinduism and the west, are today considered models of what ought to be the educated of women.'¹

1. Roman Rolland : Life and Gospel of Swamy Vivekananda; p. 330.

Vivekananda's Establishment of Vedanta Society in Foreign Countries :

Swamiji's view regarding the origin of Vedānta Society :

Swamiji gives a masterly analysis of the vexed question of the origin and aim of society, and it is a thoroughly psychological one. Psychologically, man consists of two factors, the mind and the body. Mind with its consciousness is said to be directly opposed to though somehow or other intimately connected with the body with its extension, for the mind has no extension, and the body, consciousness.

Hence, Swamiji, an astute sociologist with a robust common sense, refers to history in connection with this great problem of the origin of society and points out how spiritualism and materialism are alternately resorted to as a relief from the one to the other. Thus, raw materialism soon degenerates itself into anarchy, but when spiritualism is sought as a successor, that too, has a tendency to degenerate into priest-craft, as shown above. Speaking of the natural tendency of the East and West Swamy Vivekananda remarks : "The west is growing under the tyranny of the shylocks, and the east is groaning under the tyranny of the priests, each must keep the other in check. Do not think that one alone is to help the world."¹

Form of Society

The only one that befits a spiritual society is the criterion of truth. A spiritual is a place that society can hold truth, manifest truth, embody truth.

1 The Complete works of Swamy Vivekananda, Vol III, 6th Ed., p 158

While discussing the question as to whether the upanishadic ideals, or the Vedānta theories of the divinity oneness of all can be practised in modern society etc. Swamiji remarks in his usual vigorous manner : "Truth does not pay homage to any society, ancient or modern. Society has to pay homage to truth or die."¹

Hence, Swamiji rightly sounds a note of warning "Societies should be moulded upon truth, and truth has not to adjust itself to society. If such a noble truth as unselfishness cannot be practised in society, it is better for man to give up society, and go into the forest"²

Thus Swamy Vivekananda left no stone unturned in propogating the principles of his revered master and established many Maths, Vedantic Societies and institutions both in and outside India. He fulfilled the long cherished ambition of his master before he entered Nirvāna.

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1. Complete Works of Swamy Vivekananda, Vol II, 5th edition, p. 84.
 2. Ibid.

Conclusion

A close look at the previous chapters in which a detailed account of Vivekananda's life, ambition and mission have been clearly portrayed, enables us to understand that he is an ardent student of whatever subject he wishes to pursue and is not easily satisfied with superficial explanations of others on the problems that confront a genius. Otherwise he would not have strived much to go to proper preceptors.

Though he is an atheist in the beginning, his association with Ramakrishna Paramahansa, a mysterious personality, gradually brought about substantial changes in him, giving him an opportunity to get at truth of life which was preached and practised by him to the intellectuals and masses at large.

The stamp made by Hinduism on him is such that after thoroughly understanding the ancient intellectuals of philosophy, he wanted to shape the substance of his knowledge to suit the requirements of the age at a time when people of our country were kept in dark by the vicissitude of fortunes that were paving way for a quite different track of culture, with a view to protect Hinduism and its dharma.

His lectures delivered at Chicago in America in connection with a conference of the world religions bear ample testimony to his invincible belief in Hinduism and its greatness. He has

also amply demonstrated that other isms that sprang up from the same soil would not obliterate the original Hinduism because of its innate vitality and indeminable nature.

His Neo-Vedanta is nothing but the philosophy modified to suit the conditions of the day and moulded on the basic principles of the unalterable foundations of the past. Here he made it amply clear that philosophy is to be interpreted in consideration with the social conditions etc. of the day. He firmly believed that if society is neglected philosophy merely becomes a cry in the wilderness and all expectations of philosophy became a rope of the sand.

In conformity with his strong belief and reverence to his Guru who showed him the correct path, he tried to propagate his ideals. With this idea in mind he started Ramakrishna Mathas. The Belur Math happens to be the centre where from the light of his mission radiates. Its branches are in no way less in status and dignity, as their sole aim is of to give a soothing touch to the suffering. To-day the network of his mathas are the most prominent in their missionary activities not only in India but also abroad.

The reforms, he advocated in the fields of society, education, philosophy, religion, nay to say in the field of culture to a great extent are widely appreciated and put into practice. He feels that a Vedantin is not he who goes to forests and practice penance, but is he who lives in society and views things in a detached and dispassionate manner. The fitting memorial given to him in the waters of the Bay of Bengal in Kanyakumari at once reveals his multisided personality to the joy and amusement of the people.

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