

NOTES / PDFs

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B.A (Hons) Political Science

Topic:

Vivekananda

The Ideal Society

1 Social Philosophy of Nivekananda Reformist Conservatism

→ Social harmony and synthesis embodied in the theory of varna system of ancient India

→ Attaining the status of true Brahman.

→ India's cultural genius, Nivekananda was an iconoclastic crusader against prevailing social conservatism

→ Condemned the doctrine of Adhikaravada — meaning the exclusion of the Shudras or the masses from the benefit of the Vedic knowledge — as an undemocratic dogma

— Spiritual equality — all men are equal & equally entitled to spiritual wisdom and gnosis of the highest type — this democratic spiritualism was a radical step

denounced untouchability

wanted positive culturalisation of the religious spirit of self-realization, self-abnegation and good of the community

society — place of contradictory and conflicting concepts and each group asserts its dominance

He wanted all groups fulfill obligations
glory of an individual is ~~not~~ in self-assertion but self-immolation for universal good.

householder performing duties in selfless spirit of detachment ✓

He was believer in moderation with regard to social change
The regulations which are

PART III — CONTEMPORARY INDIAN POLITICAL THOUGHT

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Vivekananda (1863 — 1902)

On 12th January 1863 a child was born in the house of Vishvanath Datt, resident of Gormohan Mukerjee Street in North Calcutta in Bengal, who was known to the world as Vivekananda. The child was named Narendra Nath. Ramkrishna, the teacher of Vivekananda called him by this name. Bhuvaneshwari Devi, the mother of Narendra Nath was a very intelligent and religious lady. She used to recite Ramayana and Mahabharata and performed her house-hold chores with a calm mind. Thus, like M.K. Gandhi, Vivekananda owed some of his religiosity to the influence of his mother.

The early education of Narendra Nath was given through Bengali and English. His mother used to tell him the stories of Ramayana and Mahabharata. The child showed special interest in Ramayana and particularly in the character of Rama. Wherever the story of Rama was recited the child Narendra Nath used to hear it with rapt attention forgetting all childhood plays. Once he meditated in a room of his house with so much rapt attention that the door of the room had to be broken to awaken him. Thus, Yogic consciousness was evident in Vivekananda from the very beginning. He used to have peculiar experiences while sleeping. In these experiences he used to feel light between the eye-brows which gradually spread throughout his body. This experience proved the spiritual power of Narendra Nath. On the other hand, the child used to commit so much childish pranks that his mother used to say that she asked for a son to Shiva but he sent a demon to him. Narendra Nath was particularly intimate with the domestic servants.

At the age of 6, Narendra Nath started going to school. Here within a year he memorized Muktibodha. He also memorized most of the portions of Ramayana and Mahabharata. After a year he was admitted to the educational institution of Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar. His teachers here were very much impressed by his intelligence and genius and used to praise him very much. Narendra Nath was not only a good student but also a good player. He possessed sound health. In Entrance class Narendra Nath had sufficient knowledge of English and

Bangla literature and Indian history. His understanding was deep and memory sharp. He could follow a writer by only reading some of the lines written by him. He could understand the subject of a book by merely reading some portions of it. He passed Entrance examination in first division. After it he entered Presidency College. Here also he very much impressed his teachers. His principal W.W. Hasti used to say that he never saw a genius like Narendra Nath. Narendra Nath had a multisided genius. At the college stage he had achieved an intimate knowledge of English literature, European history, philosophy, science, art, music and medicine.

During this period, Brahmo Samaj was very popular in Bengal. The leaders of Brahmo Samaj had wide influence over the Bengali youth. Narendra Nath was also influenced by Brahmo Samaj and became a member of it. This influence was particularly due to his intellectual outlook. He never agreed to admit a thing without understanding it. He was vehemently against superstitions. He was a staunch supporter of social reform. He had a keen desire to participate in the progress of his country. All these tendencies took him to Brahmo Samaj. However, gradually he became dissatisfied. Once he asked Devendranath Thakur, the greatest leader of Brahmo Samaj, "Sir, Have you seen God." He did not receive any satisfactory answer.

During this time Ramakrishna, the priest of the Kali temple of Dakshineswar had a name in Calcutta. He was a devotee of a high order and it is said that he realised Kali directly. He used to believe in the value of all the religions. He preached that all religions are essentially similar. The principal of the college of Narendra Nath told him about Ramakrishna. Narendra Nath went to Ramakrishna. Ramakrishna identified the spiritual powers of Narendra Nath at the very first sight. He exclaimed that here is an incarnation of Narayan who is born to remove the sufferings of mankind. On the other hand, Narendra Nath felt that Ramakrishna was a bit abnormal. However, he asked the old question. "Sir, Have you seen God?" The reply which he received was never expected. Ramakrishna told him, "Yes, I see him just as I see you here." Narendra Nath was deeply impressed but not completely satisfied. He continued to meet Ramakrishna more often and gradually came under his influence.

In 1884 the father of Narendra Nath passed away due to heart attack. At this time Narendra Nath was only a graduate and studying law. But now the entire financial responsibility of the family came upon his head. His relatives used to tease his family. He did not get any job. He could not repay the debts he owed to many persons. Under these hard circumstances Narendra Nath had crisis of faith. However, the adversities, sufferings and troubles subdued his ego and evoked his faith. Like Gautama, the Buddha, he experienced that everywhere there is suffering in this world. This led him to the resolve to remove sufferings of his countrymen. This also increased his faith in Ramakrishna.

Narendra Nath received his initiation in Vedanta from Ramakrishna. Ramakrishna had extraordinary yogic powers. In 1885 he gave Narendra Nath the experience of attributeless Samadhi by his mere touch and ordered him that his first duty is to fulfil the mission of Ramakrishna. Narendra Nath was the

leader of the association of the young followers of Ramakrishna. This association was founded with the purpose of spirituality and welfare of humanity. As the leader of this association, called Ramakrishna Mission, Narendra Nath propagated the views of Ramakrishna everywhere. Beloor near Howrah was made the head office of Ramakrishna Mission and the centre of its activities. Narendra Nath was now known as Vivekananda. He extensively toured the country and tried to understand and solve its problems.

In 1888 Vivekananda left Calcutta alone. He went to Varanasi, Ayodhya, Lucknow, Agra, Vrindavan and Hathras. At Hathras he was accompanied by his disciple Sadanand. Both of them now toured Himalayas. In Himalaya Vivekananda had a vision of the soul of India. After a year Vivekananda again toured several places within the country including Gazipur and Varanasi. In February 1891 he went to Rajasthan, Bombay and Rameshwaram. In Rameshwaram he went to Kanyakumari. There he sat on a rock in the sea and had his realisation of the great unity of India. At present there is on this rock the world famous Vivekananda Memorial.

In 1883 Vivekananda heard that a Parliament of Religions was being organised in Chicago in U.S.A. He decided to participate in this parliament in order to give his message to the World. He was very much pained by the poverty of India and wanted to draw the attention of the West towards this problem. This was one of the important purpose of his visit of U.S.A. Before going to U.S.A. he went to Khetri, the king of this state was his disciple. It was this princely disciple who suggested the name of Swami Vivekananda which was adopted by Narendra Nath.

On May 31, 1893 Swami Vivekananda left Bombay for U.S.A. In the way he went to Ceylon, Penang, Singapore, Hong Kong, Kentan and Nagasaki. Seeing the influence of Indian culture and Sanskrit language at all these places he realised the spiritual unity of Asia. He reached Chicago in mid-July. Seeing the spectacular progress of knowledge and science at U.S.A., he was highly impressed. After twelve days he reached the information office of the proposed Parliament of Religions. He was told that the parliament will be held in the first week of September and his name cannot be included in the list of delegates until it is recommended by someone in U.S.A. or elsewhere. Vivekananda sent a telegram to his friends to Madras for recommendation but got no success. However, the genius like Vivekananda hardly needed any introduction. His personality was his best certificate. While travelling in the train at Boston Swami Vivekananda met a rich lady of Messachusetts. She called him at her residence and introduced him to Professor J.H. Wright of the department of Greek studies at the Harvard University. Wright was very much impressed by Vivekanand and introduced him to Dr. Bros, the chairman of the selection committee of the delegates by writing, "Here is a person who is a greater scholar than all our scholar professors added together." He insisted that Vivekananda should be admitted as the representative of Hinduism at the Parliament of Religions. He also gave Vivekananda rail ticket to Chicago and a letter of recommendation of lodging and boarding. Unfortunately Vivekananda

lost these papers during the journey. However, these were received by a lady G.W. Hale who contacted Vivekananda and took him to the Parliament, where he was respectfully admitted as a delegate and arrangements of his stay were made alongwith other representatives from the East.

The Parliament of Religions was inaugurated on 11th September 1883 at Columbus Hall. Religious leaders of the world had gathered there to hear Swami Vivekananda in the evening of the first day. They welcomed by prolonged clapping the first words of Vivekananda, "American brothers and sisters." Leaving all formalities of the Parliament Swami Vivekananda presented his ideas in such a direct and clear language that the Parliament was very much impressed. After it he delivered a dozen lectures in U.S.A. which made him famous in the West. *New York Herald* proclaimed him as the greatest person at the Parliament of Religions and wrote that after hearing him we feel that how much foolish it is to send religious missionaries to the nation of such a great scholar. During his lectures Swami Vivekananda repeatedly drew the attention of the West to the problems of India. On the invitation of Bureau he visited several places in U.S.A. and delivered lectures which had wide influence over American intelligentsia. He was offered the headship of department of Eastern philosophy at Harvard University and Sanskrit language at Columbia University which he declined saying that he was a Sanyasin.

On 7th August, 1895 Swami Vivekananda left U.S.A. for England. The British newspapers compared him to Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Keshabchandra Sen and even Gautama the Buddha. He was welcomed by heads of various churches and he delivered several lectures in England. It is here that Miss Margaret E. Nobel, the later Sister Nivedita met his teacher Vivekananda for the first time. His lectures on Jnanayoga in London particularly became famous.

On 6th December, 1895 Swami Vivekananda reached New York from England. Here he delivered lectures on Karmayoga and Bhaktiyoga at the residence of Miss S.E. Waldo who later on became his disciple known as Hari Dasi. Vivekananda delivered lectures in a very informal but influential style. Gradually, the number of his American disciples increased. In February 1896 he laid the foundation of the famous Vedanta Society of New York. He also delivered lectures on Vedanta philosophy in the philosophy department of Harvard University. His lecture here on 25th March, 1896 was so impressive that he was offered the chair of Eastern philosophy. Swami Vivekananda had no financial difficulty as he was receiving overwhelming cooperation from all sides.

In April 1896 Swami Vivekananda left America for England and in the month of May delivered 5 lectures per week on Vedanta. He delivered three lectures, at Royal Institute of Painters, Picadelli. He also spoke at Princess Hall, Annie Besant Lodge and other well known Clubs and Educational institutions. Max Muller invited him to his residence at Oxford and was very much influenced by him. From England Swami Vivekananda went to Switzerland on the persuasion of some of his friends. In August 1896 he was invited by

Ancient Democratic Ideal

Thus, Vivekananda considered democracy as the best form of government. He was against monarchy though it has been praised in ancient Indian literature. He also condemned aristocracy as the tyranny of a minority. Though he was very much aware of the defects of democratic forms of government in different countries of his own time, he praised it as the only type of government in which a spiritual society may be possible. Explaining his idea of democracy in the tradition of ancient Indian thought he said that, "the voice of the ruled in the government of their land — which is the watchword of the modern Western world, and of which the last expression has been echoed with a thundering voice in the Declaration of the American Government, in the words, 'That the government of the people of this country must be by the people and for the good of the people' — cannot however be said to have been totally unrecognised in Ancient India."¹²⁴

Self-Government

Thus, the ideal government is self-government. *Swadharma* is the principle of life everywhere, individual, social, economic or political. This self-government is possible only through acting upon the teaching of Upanishads. In the words of Vivekananda, "When the government of a country is guided by codes of laws, enjoined by Shastras which are the outcome of knowledge inspired by the divine genius of great sages, such a government must lead to the unbroken welfare of the rich and the poor, the wise and the ignorant, the king and the subjects alike."¹²⁵