

# Indian Culture: Spiritual, Moral and Religious Philosophy of Swami Vivekananda

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## ABSTRACT

Swami Vivekananda, the great spiritual leader attached considerable significance to moral problems like the problems of religion. Practically defining, religion and ethics are very much interlinked. It is more so in India because both fix at the same destination in their own ways. Despite this, theoretically the distinction between the two cannot be neglected. Religion is a faith in divine force which is regarded as the guiding principle of this universe in some way or the other. This study analyses the principle which is known through various names as Supreme Reality, Highest Force, Almighty and God. But in all these conceptions, there is hidden belief that there is a divine power through which the whole world mechanism is guided. It is accepted that man attempts to understand that ultimate ground of this universe through several ways and this attempt on the part of man to know the actuality of religion. When we try to understand the relationship between religion and ethics: one significant question arises at the very outset. That is whether the belief in God is important for leading ethical life or not? Thinkers say that belief in God is not important for leading a moral life.

**Keywords:** *Culture, Heritage, Morality, Religion, Philosophy*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Religious man can never be unethical. In religion, we find ethical ideals like non-violence, truthfulness, love and brotherhood. The purpose of each religion is the realisation of highest power and the means prescribed for getting that purpose are genuine thought and action. All moral ideals come under the purity of thought and action. Purity of thought has no significance for a religious man unless it is practised in real life. The main aim of religion is the realisation of God and He is regarded as the embodiment of justice. Thus, a religious man considers moral values means for the realisation of God. Dr. I.C. Sharma comments:

A moral man can afford to be an atheist, but a truly religious person can never  
afforded to be immoral.

(Sharma, 1963 pp.50)

It is clear that religion is the centre around which the moral principles are revolving. So there is something like the affinity of cordiality and co-operation. We may call that self-surrender of religion and self realization of ethics mean more or less the same thing mainly in over Indian philosophical background. Now, in this context Dr. Surma Das Gupta observes:

Morality is the technique of his self-expressions; it gives concrete forms to his dreams,  
helps him to actualise his vision by practicable details. Morality loss its true significance if  
separated from religion in a higher senses that of spiritual attainment

(Gupta, 1961 pp.3)

It is well known fact that the moral thoughts of Swami Vivekananda is nothing fundamentally new but the credit goes to him because he attempted to provide a dynamic and practical view to moral conceptions of *Hindu* ethics based on the lesson of our *Vedas* and *Upanishads*. Swami Vivekananda presented these ethical conceptions more scientifically. His idea of *Brahman*, *Atman* and bondage of *Atman* are based on Shankar's ideas of *Brahman* and *Atman* to a great of extent. Again it is believed that his exposition of the three paths of

salvation: the *Jnana-yoga*, the *karma yoga* and *Bhagkti-yoga* is based on the lessons of the *Bhagavad-Gita* which is said to be the quintessence of the *Upanishadic* lessons. Again the fourth path of salvation as defined by him seems to be based on the *yoga-sutra* of Pantanjali. It is recognized as the *Raja- yoga*. We further see that his lesson of renunciation and duty seems to us to be influenced by the teachings of Buddha and Ramakrishna Paramhansa. Swami Vivekananda's views on the bondage of the self and the emancipation form cardinal points of Indian ethics. Swami Vivekananda believes that *Brahman* is the only Reality. *Brahman* himself is the universe and universe itself is *Brahman*. He is the creator. He defines that there is identity between *Brahman* and *Atman*. The actuality of *Brahman* and the identity between *Brahman* and individual itself is narrated by the *Advaitist* through the following maxims; *Brahm satyam jagat mithya jivo brahmaiva naparah*. It is the existence of the universe that is showing itself from the lowest insect to the highest perfect being. He defines his views:

There is but one Soul in the universe not two. It neither comes nor goes. It is neither born, nor dies, nor reincarnates. How can It die? Where can It go? All these heavens, all these earths and all these places are vain imaginations of the mind.

(Vivekananda, 1955)

The soul passes through various lives till it becomes perfect. The stage of perfection is nothing but the realisation of the innate infinity. There is no place of gods in the Philosophy of *Advaita* as it knows only the reality of *Brahman* and at the same time identity between *Brahman* and *Atman*. Swami Vivekananda remarks:

What does the *Advaitist* preach? He dethrones all the gods that ever existed or over will exist in the universe and places on that throne the self of man, The *Atman* Higher than the sun and the moon, higher than the heavens, greater than this great universe itself. No books, no scripture, no science can ever imagine the glory of the self that appears as man, the most glorious God that ever was, the only god that ever existed, exists or ever will exist I am to worship, therefore, none but myself.

(Vivekananda, 1955)

## 2. DISCUSSION

The question is if soul is eternal, so how can it become the subject of bondage? Swami Vivekananda remarks that the soul is not eternally bound. The bondage of the soul is apparent and not actual. We are spiritually pure, emancipated and perfect. But when we are attached to ourselves i.e. the feeling of little. The bondage is nothing but a veil of ignorance. As soon as the veil is lifted, we see the Infinite Existence in ourselves. It is worthless to search freedom outside us. The emancipation lies in the bosom of the soul. The *Advaitist* gives us lesson to know the truth and be free in a moment. As soon as this truth is known by us our ignorance vanishes when this truth is realized by us, all the differences between men and women, God and Angel, animals and plants will disappear and we will be in a condition to relive oneness of existence in this reference, he declares:

He who in this world of many sees that one, he who in the mass of insentiency less that or one sentient being he who is this world of shadows. Catches is that reality, unto him belong internal places, unto none else, unto none else.

(Vivekananda, 1955)

*Advaita* philosophy has also obtained paramount significance in the realm of moral philosophy. The *Advaitist* preaches us to give up all the conception of manifoldness and emphasise that the whole universe is but one reality. When this oneness of existence would be felt, all the evil thoughts of the mind would automatically vanish and the soul would enjoy permanent peace and happiness.

According to Swami Vivekananda *Atman* is not bound. But it becomes subject of bondage due to ignorance. Human being is the constituent of three elements the body, the mind and the self. The body is the

external covering of the soul, the mind is the internal coating of the soul, and the soul itself is the eternal, pure, genuine perfect and all-pervading actuality. The soul is the conscious element in the body. It acts through mind and body and enjoys the fruits of its action. The action performed by man produces an impression in the mind called *Sanskar*. These *Sanskaras* unitedly create a power which is summoned character. This character is the effect of the physical and mental performances performed by the individual. After the demise of the human being the elements which create the body dissolve in its component elements but the *Sanskaras* remain in the form of best and finer element. These *Sanskaras* become a power and due to this power Atman is needed to assume another body. Swami Vivekananda compares the function of the *Sanskaras* with the whirlwind Swami Vivekananda remarks thus:

When the whirl falls down, The *Atman* finds that it is all pervading. It can go where  
It likes It entirely free, and is able to manufacture any number of minds or bodies  
It likes; but until then It can go only with the whirl. This freedom is the goal  
towards which we are all moving.

(Vivekananda, 1955)

Thus it is clear from the above words of Swami Vivekananda that the eternal soul becomes subject to bondage due to its own actions. According to *Advaitist*, one has to set the wheel in motion and the wheel of birth and death goes on till the motion ceases. The continuous cycle of birth and death goes on till the soul realises its perfect nature. Swami Vivekananda states that:

A soul enters one form, resides in it for a time then leaves it and goes into another  
and quit that again for a third. Thus, the round goes on, till it comes out of the  
wheel and becomes free.

(Vivekananda, 1955)

Swami Vivekananda believed the fact that ignorance is the root cause of bondage. Due to ignorance we are not aware of our real nature and become subject to bondage he remarks thus:

.....ignorance is the great mother of all misery, and the fundamental ignorance  
is to think that the Infinite weeps and cries, that He is finite. This is the basis of all  
ignorance that we, the immortal, the ever pure, the perfect spirit, think that we are  
little minds, that we are little bodies; it is the mother of all selfishness.

(Vivekananda, 1955)

Infinite reality is our real nature. The whole world is attempting to get freedom. Freedom is said to be the goal of the soul. But this freedom can be obtained either through *Jnana* or *Karma* or *Bhakti* or through psychic control. These are different kinds of people in the world.

Some men attempt to reveal the secret of ignorance through *Jnana* and they are summoned *Jnana yogi*. Some attempt to achieve their goal performing action selflessly and they are called *Karma yogi*. Again, some men attempt to establish communion with God through love and they are known '*Bhakta*' (devotees). And lastly, there are people who attempt to realise god by their power of concentration and this technique of realisation is known *Raja-yoga*. Thus there are four ways for the realisation of *Moksha*; *Jnana-yoga*, *Karma-yoga*, *Bhakti-yoga* and *Raja-yoga*.

*Jnana-yoga* is the way of realisation of the supreme reality, i.e. *Brahman* through knowledge. The bondage is due to ignorance and hence, there is no emancipation without knowledge. It tells us that one can get the idea of the reality only by obtaining perfect knowledge. Only knowledge about reality is not sufficient for realisation of *Brahman*. The fact about reality is first to be heard, thought and meditated upon. These three steps are summoned *sravana*, *manana* and *nididhyasna*. By controlling the body, the senses and the mind, one can concentrate on the Highest Reality and through this concentration one can obtained perfect peace. *Bhagavad-Gita* defines the characteristics of the *Jnana-yogi* thus:

He who abandons all desires and acts free from longing, without any sense of fineness or egotism, he attains the peace.

(Prabhupada, 2006)

Dr. Radhakrishnan also describes the nature of the *Jnana-yogi* thus.

When all beings are attracted by the glitter of sense- objects, the sage is intent on understanding reality. He is wakeful to the nature of reality to which the unwise is asleep or indifferent.

(Radhakrishnan, 1976)

Swami Vivekananda has also been influenced by *Gita*. He attempted to present its lessons in a more realistic and rationalistic way. When a person concentrates fully on that reality, then all the visions of unreality disappear. After that, he is in a status to realize that there is no distinction between *Atman* and *Brahman*. This way of obtaining perfection is summoned *Jnana-yoga* because in this *yoga*, an individual gets perfection only through knowledge. But it is a *yoga* which can be practiced only by some persons who are more intellectually and mentally powerful. The practice of renunciation by the *Jana-yogi* is a very arduous action. The nature of the senses and mind is so changing that it even carries away the sense of understanding. So, it is a very hard work to control the senses and the mind. According to *Gita*:

When the mind runs after the roving senses, it carries away the understanding even as a wind carries away a ship on the waters.

(Prabhupada, 2006)

It is arduous task to control the mind and the sense, a *Jnana-yogi* by his continuous attempts succeeds in developing control over his senses and mind and through continuous meditation on the reality, he is in a status to realize that he himself is *Brahman*.

Now the question arises as to what is the need of realising the identity between *Atman* and *Brahman*? The practical utility of knowing the identity between the two is the attainment of happiness and perfect peace.

The path of *Karma-yoga* has been prescribed for active people in this world. Swami Vivekananda's *karma-yoga* is based on the teachings of the *Bhagavad-Gita*. Swami Vivekananda remarks.

*Karma-yoga*, therefore a system of ethics and religion intended to attain freedom through unselfishness and by good works. The *karma-yogi* need not believe in any doctrine whatever. He may not believe even in God, may not ask what his soul is, nor, think of any metaphysical speculation. He has got his own special aim of realising selfishness, and he has to work it out himself.

(Mayavati, 1970)

The third path of liberation is *Bhakti-yoga* that is the way of realising God through intense love and devotion. This union with Almighty through intense devotion is the easiest of all the paths leading to liberation. Swami Vivekananda defines the true meaning of love:

The love for our children and our wives is mere animal love; that love which is perfectly unselfish is the only love, and this is of God. It is very difficult thing to attain to.

(Mayavati, 1970)

### 3. CONCLUSION

The qualities for the religious aspirant are *Viveka* (discrimination of food), *Ashraya* (purity of food), *Nimitt*, (purity in food by avoiding dirt and dust), *Vimoka*, (freedom from desire), *Abhyasa* (practice), *Kriya* (doing good to others), *Kalyan* (truthfulness) and *Anavasad* (Cheerfulness). Swami Vivekananda believes in

theory of *Ishta* derived from the root *Ish* which means to desire or choose. A person chooses his own ideal and worship God in the same way. He remarks:

It is the only way to make religion meet practically the necessities of different constitutions, avoid quarrelling with others, and to make real practical progress in spiritual life.

(Mayavati, 1970)

*Raja-Yoga* of Pantanjali as defined by Swami Vivekananda is a path to liberation through bodily and mental exercises. He says that the system of *Raja-Yoga* is not something mysterious. He observes:

It is wrong to blindly believe. You must exercise your own reason and judgement, you must practise, and see whether these things happen or not. Just as you would take up any other science, exactly in the same manner you should take up this science for study. These is neither mystery nor danger in it. So far as it is true it ought to be preached in the public streets, in broad daylight.

(Mayavati, 1970)

A man who is desirous of practicing this yoga is needed to be conscious of his food, sleep, physical and mental purity and perseverance. After fulfilling the preliminary steps of becoming a *yogi*, one is expected to follow the eight-fold path of *Raja-yoga* which consists of *Yama*, (non-killing, truthfulness, continence, non-receiving of any gift and non-stealing), *Niyama* (cleanliness, contentment, study and dedication to God), *Yama* and *Niyama* are preparations. *Asana* (bodily postures), *Pranayama: Prana* (breathing) and *Ayama* (control), *Pratyahara* (withdraw his senses and control his mind). Swami Vivekananda defines:

He who has succeeded in attaching or detaching his mind to or from the centres at will has succeeded in *Pratyahara*, which means 'gathering towards' checking the out-going powers of the mind, freeing it from the thralldom of the senses.

(Mayavati, 1970)

*Dharana* (Concentration), *Dhyana* (Meditation) and *Samadhi* (beyond the state self-consciousness) are the next steps of liberation. The whole concept in the picture is that by these paths of the *Karma*, *Jnana*, *Bhakti* and *yoga* (concentration of mind) the paramatman is obtained.

So he attempted to synthesise the four ways of liberation that is an outstanding way. Thus we find that his moral philosophy is equally liberalistic and realistic as is the matter with his religious philosophy. In truth, there is a perfect relationship between the two.

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