

Vivekananda and Social and Individual Values in 21st Century

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Advaita is Indian Spirituality

The Advaita teaching of the Brahman is one of the most fundamental aspects of Indian spirituality. The truth of mysticism, i.e. the Brahman is only real, is a pan-Hindu thought. The history of Hindu religions is comprised of the Hindu orthodoxy of this Brahman-monism as its trunk and two doctrines of thought of Bhakti and Tantrism as its branches and leaves.

Irrespective of Viṣṇu-worship or Śiva-worship, Bhakti has overwhelmingly prevailed in Hindu religiosity. All Bhakti-based teachings beginning with Rāmānuja's Vīṣṭādvaita Vedānta and Madhva's Dvaita Vedānta found their identities in their distinctions from Advaita Vedānta, while putting various meanings such as meditation or love on the idea of Bhakti. Even the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa* could not have ignored the Advaita dogma.

Tantrism is presumably non-Āryan and therefore basically did not adhere to Advaita dogma. It permeated part of Hindu worships, mostly in Śiva-worships, and we indeed have sects of Hindu Tantrism in Śaiva and Śākta. [We should understand that Śiva-bhakti exists even within sects of Tantrism.]

Ramakrishna was not only a Śākta but also a Tantrist, worshipping Kālī which he called Mā. He identified Kālī with Kṛṣṇa, Brahman and even with Buddha, Jesus Christ and Allah. All of them are nothing but a manifestation of Brahman. This recognition led to 'all religions are one,' on which basis, his disciple, Vivekananda established Ramakrishna Order, the headquarters for his mission to the world.

The Lay Religion

Although Vedānta was entirely monastic, Vivekananda decided his mission was to the secular world. He advocated the religion by propagating Advaita among ordinary people. After establishing the Ramakrishna Order he divided it into the Ramakrishna Math and the Ramakrishna Mission. The former is literally a monastery and the temple where Saṁnyāsins lived a very disciplined life aiming for liberation and the latter is the association where a majority of foreigners joined the mission with the intent of spreading it beyond the borders of India. Today, there are more than a hundred missions worldwide which spread the religious teachings of Ramakrishna and serve as a base for other missionary activities. The motto of the Mission at the headquarters is to materialize the Advaitic ideal stating 'if it is a true religion it must be practical'.

In the monastery of Advaita only qualified followers equipped with *sādhana-catuṣṭaya* were admitted and could start one's monastic life. In there, being derived from BU 2.4.5: *ātma vā are draṣṭavyaḥ śrotavyo mantavyo nididhyāsītavyo maitreyī* "Ātman is really to be seen, to be heard, to be pondered over and to be meditated on." *śravaṇa*, *manana* and *nididhyāsana* are three stages needed to reach enlightenment; at the final stage, when a guru speaks to his disciple with the words of *mahāvākya*, *tat tvam asi* 'that you are', the disciple, in response to the guru's words at that instant answers *aham brahmāsmi* "I am the Brahman".

The four qualifications are:

- (1) *nityānityavastuviveka*,
- (2) *ihāmutra(artha)phalabhogavirāga*,
- (3) *śamadamādisādhanasampad*,
- (4) *mumukṣutva*

The eternal one (*nitya*) is only the Brahman, therefore *nityānityavastuviveka* is to know anything but the Brahman, i.e. non-eternal things/beings (*anitya*).

Furthermore, as it is the Brahman that is obtained only by means of knowledge, whatever is known by any other means than knowledge is all non-eternal things/beings. Knowing this, desires for them (*anitya*) is to be given up. That will cause the desire for the Brahman. This is very much initial motivation—for without the desire for the Brahman, no one would like to be initiated into the monastery.

Ihāmutra(artha)phalabhogavirāga is to give up desires for sons (*putra*), wealth (*vitta*) and three worlds (*trilokas*) which are the fruits of this secular world. Moreover, it conveys the idea of giving up dreaming or desiring enjoyable life after death, heaven, and pure land.

Śamadamādisādhanasampad is based on BU 4.4.23:

tasmād evaṃvicchanto dānta uparatas titikṣuḥ samāhito

bhūtvātmany evātmānam paśyati, sarvam ātmānam paśyati

According to Upaniṣad to reach *śamadamādisādhanasampad* is to be enlightened, but in Advaita it is nothing but a prerequisite. In Advaita, it is important for one to be doing it before being initiated and it does not mean that it necessarily has to be completed. Even after being initiated, in the course of monastic disciplinary life, *śamadama* etc. is to be obtained. Thus, *sampad* is something to be carried out but not to have been completed.

Thus after these three *sādhanas*, one is to become (4)*mumukṣu* 'one who is desirous of enlightenment/liberation'.

Individual Values

There was four *Āśramas* (stages of life) in Indian traditional society, viz. Brahmacharya, *Gr̥hastha*, *Vānaprastha*, *Samnyāsa*. In the case of modern society, most people stay at *Gr̥hastha-āśrama* up to the end of their life. And as previously discussed, Ramakrishna Mission is the association for those lay people, i.e. those who are at *Gr̥hastha-āśrama*. The lay devotees are observing obligations

prescribed in a Law Book like the *Manusmṛti*, and at the same time they are expected to do religious activities as devotees. Therefore, prescribed ritual activities like *nityanaimittikakarmans* are to be performed without aiming at fruits, where as in the case of the *Gītā*, ritual activities can be a means to knowledge. And *śamadama* [which can be done at the same time] can be an aid to pinpointing to the Brahman.

Furthermore, *śravaṇa*, *manana* and *nididhyāsana* are also to be pursued in the secular world. When Vivekananda says that religion is practical, the practice means to act for serving the poor. But in individual religious life, one should try to listen to the preachings of teachers and actual books. *Śravaṇa* is very important for the improvement of one's mentality and spirituality.

Social Values

According to Advaita, "There was only one and not second" (*ekam evādvitīyam*), and *mahāvākyas* like *tat tvam asi*, *aham brahmāsmi* imply 'the Brahman is only real' or 'all is nothing but the Brahman.' All philosophical teachings were deduced from this notion and all social ethics and morals are based on this important idea.

Positive and Active

Vivekananda says 'If it is a true religion, it must be practical'. Advaita is not an intellectual game, but should be materialized in the actual life. If at all a religion could not be a relief for human beings, it does not deserve to exist, and will be a theory for a few selected elite. Vivekananda says 'work like a master and not as a slave; work incessantly, but do not do slave's work'. In support of Vivekananda, *Gītā* 2.47 states:

karmāṇi evādhikāras te mā phaleṣu kadācana /

mā karmaphalahetur bhūr mā te saṅgo 'sty akarmaṇi //

"Thy business is with the action only, never with its fruits; so let not the fruit

of action be thy motive, nor be thou to inaction attached.”

Aiming only at the action without any consideration of result; the action itself is the aim.

An important aspect of his teachings is that devotees engage in religious activities with faith and confidence. ‘Truth be strengthening, must be enlightening and invigorating. ... For the next fifty years, let all the vain gods disappear from our minds. And the first gods we have to worship are our own country-man.’

Serve the Poor, and Arguments Against the Social Inequalities

Daridra-Nārāyaṇa is Vivekananda's coinage. The human being is the manifested form of God, and therefore service to the human being is nothing but that to god. Especially one who needs help is god in the needy form of god, Nārāyaṇa. To give them our hands is not the action as a god but the act of worshipping and the reality of religion.

“If you cannot love your neighbor whom you have seen, how can you love God whom you have not seen”

“When you see man as God, everything, even the tiger, will be welcome ... He is in everything, He is everything. Every man and woman is the palpable, blissful, living God.”

Thus the service to the poor is the highest form of worship of all acts and the best means to reach enlightenment; for God is universal and it is God who is all.

Thus if all is the Brahman and the poor and needy are Daridra-Nārāyaṇa, not only the poor and needy but also those who are socially discriminated according to sex and ethnicity are to be saved. The agonizing words of Vivekananda, ‘India's doom was sealed on the very day they invented the word *mleccha* and stopped from communion with others’ shows his strong antagonistic standpoint against the caste-system.

Conclusion

Vivekananda is the missionary of Ramakrishna rather than that of Advaita. He shows the importance of teachings through practical activities. The reason why he is specifically mentioned is that he made the world recognize Hinduism as a universal or world religion like Christianity, Buddhism and Islam. Prior to his mission, Hinduism was not regarded as a major world religion despite its universality of Advaita. He put special modern significance on Advaita, and re-interpreted Advaita as a practical religion.

With the coming of 21st century, we claim that Vivekananda's teaching of Advaita, in the form of a practical religion are changing the Advaita from one that has roots in Indian spirituality to one that is becoming more centered on human spirituality going beyond the barriers of nationality and ethnicity. Advaita is now not only concerned with Indian spirituality but human spirituality encompassing all races, ethnicities and nationalities represented on earth. As the barriers that once hindered the spreading of Advaita disappear, combined with the increase of religious activities by foreign devotees, Vivekananda's Advaita and Ramakrishna Mission will be developing as a religion accepted throughout the world in the coming century.

*This is a reproduction of the lecture with some alterations, delivered at the meeting in honor of Swami Vivekananda's Birth Anniversary held in Tokyo in 2000.