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SWAMI VIVEKANANDA'S PHILOSOPHY OF DEMOCRACY AND ITS RELEVANCE IN PRESENT SOCIETY

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Abstract

Swami Vivekananda, the chief disciple of the 19th century saint Ramakrishna Paramhansa, dedicated his entire life to the spiritual and social upliftment of the common men. He was a key figure in introducing Indian philosophies to the western world and to bring India's culture and prestige to the whole world with the words "Brothers and Sisters".

In the philosophy of Swami Vivekananda, the idea of democracy occupied a very prominent place. Swami Vivekananda was in fact, a firm believer in the institution of democracy. He viewed democracy both as a form of government and a way of life. It was he who laid utmost importance on the individuals' freedom. He considered freedom as the natural and inherent right of the individual. The whole universe, according to him, is a manifestation of individuals' struggle to attain freedom and there can be no life without

the idea of freedom. Besides liberty, Vivekananda also recognized the necessity of equality in order to establish a democratic society.

As a supporter of democracy, Vivekananda wanted to bring a qualitative change in it and for achieving this objective he put special emphasis on the man-making process. He strongly believed that a qualitative change in democracy can be brought about by the spread of man-making theories and education.

Key Words: Democracy, Liberty, Equality, Education and man-making process

INTRODUCTION

Swami Vivekananda was one of the great patriot sons of India who dedicated his entire life to the spiritual and social upliftment of the common man. As a lover of mankind, Vivekananda always tried to promote peace and human brotherhood on the spiritual foundation of the Vedantic oneness of existence. He was the chief disciple of the 19th century saint Ramakrishna and a key figure in introducing Indian Philosophies of Vedanta and Yoga to the western world.

It may be mentioned that the idea of democracy occupies a very important place in the philosophy of Swami Vivekananda. His philosophy of democracy infect, depicts the picture of his man-making process and describes democracy both as a way of life and as a form of government.

In this paper an endeavour has been made to analyse Vivekananda's views on democracy and the man-making process.

DEMOCRACY AS A WAY OF LIFE

Swami Vivekananda was a firm believer in the institution of democracy. By democracy he meant both a form of government and a way of life. According to him, democracy as a government could not last long without a way of life and as a way of life it envisages freedom, equality, brotherhood and their union.¹ It was because of his supreme faith in the inalienability of freedom, equality and unity that Vivekananda upheld democracy as a

way of life. He was of the opinion that an democratic environment is very useful for individual growth and freedom.

CONCEPT OF INDIVIDUAL FREEDOM

Considering freedom as the natural and inherent right of the individual Vivekananda declared that there can be no life without the idea of freedom. He regarded freedom as an indispensable part of individual as well as social life. He was of the view that freedom is natural and it is the utmost necessity for individual and social growth.

Vivekananda also affirmed the principle of individual and social self-determination by opposing outside intervention which according to him was detrimental to individual and social growth. Explaining the importance of liberty, Vivekananda said that individual and social growth can be achieved only when there is the absence of force or imitation from outside.

While talking about individual freedom Vivekananda included every aspect of freedom in it. He pointed out that the society in order to move in the path of progress must not deny or exclude any aspect of freedom of the individual.

It is important to mention here that Vivekananda condemned both the Indian and the Western society for laying exclusive emphasis on one aspect of freedom. He said that while on the one hand, the Indian society laid emphasis on religious liberty and denied social liberty, the Western society on the other hand, encouraged social growth and freedom; but it suppressed religious freedom.²

According to Vivekananda, this was obviously one of the main reason for weak social organization in India. As compared to this, he said, the west always had a good and efficient social organization. Because the society in the west always had freedom.

Vivekananda not only identified the defects of the Indian and the western society but also provided a solution to this problem. He said that the one-sided outlook of liberty of the East and the west can be avoided by encouraging the growth of both the spiritual and secular aspect of liberty.

Freedom, for Vivekananda was both a means as well as an end to establish a democratic society. He said that society must recognize and defend individual freedom as it is the spiritual necessity for individual perfection. He was of the view that social recognition of freedom is necessary to create equal rights which assist the individual growth.

Besides liberty, Vivekananda also recognize the necessity of equality in order to realize a democratic society. Equality, according to him, is the way to freedom while inequality is the way to bondage. ³ Vivekananda however, did not support absolute equality as he thought it to be a state of death.

Vivekananda was in favour of providing equal opportunities for all without any discrimination. He said that all individuals should be given equal opportunities and there should not be any discrimination between man and man on grounds of birth, wealth and education etc.

Vivekananda always worked for the upliftment of the average people of the society. He was interested to provide more opportunities to the poor and weak than he rich and intelligent for their quick improvement.

DEMOCRACY AS A FORM OF GOVERNMENT

Vivekananda did not favour monarchical and aristocratic form of government and considered democracy as the best form of government. He believed that a spiritual society is possible only in the democratic type of government.

Vivekananda was a believer in the evolutionary nature of the society which according to him was possible through cyclical rule of the cast system. He maintained that the theory of forms of government (namely the Brahmin, the Kshatriya, the Vaisya and the Shudra) is an outcome of the cyclical cast rule. He was of the view that the forms of government were evolutionary because of the evolutionary nature of the cyclical cast rule.

Vivekananda praised the Brahmin rule for its accumulation of spiritual lore, the Kshatriya for promoting science and civilization and the Vaisya for forging international contracts.⁴ All these forms of caste rule, according to him, became degenerated in course of time. He was of the view that the cyclical replacement of Vaishya ultimately paves the way for the rise of Shudra. Vivekananda identified the Shudra rule with democracy and became their votary.⁵

It has been mentioned earlier that Vivekananda was an ardent defender of the institution of democracy because he was not agreed to emphasise upon the rule of one or the few. People according to him, always constitute the source of power in all forms of government and so he always favoured the government of the people and by the people. He laid special emphasis in strengthening democratic form of government because he believed that democracy provides better opportunities for people to uplift themselves.

It must be noted that as votary of Philosophy of Vedanta, Vivekananda opposed the existence of party system which according to him creates division in the society. He therefore, emphasized on the man-making process in order to avoid the evils of representative democracy.

THE MAN-MAKING PROCESS- A MISSION OF LIFE

Vivekananda's emphasis on the man-making process was a commendable contribution to the Indian Political Thought. He in fact, wanted to bring a qualitative change in democracy by the spread of man-making theories and education.

While talking about qualitative change Vivekananda put special emphasis on the improvement of people. He came to believe that people's active participation in governmental activities can be ensured by eliminating their inabilities through education.

THE MAN-MAKING PROCESS ACCORDING TO SWAMI VIVEKANANDA

To Vivekananda man-making process involved the spread of education among people which will enabled them to think and act independently. He realized the importance of people's active participation in the activities of the government and said that mere passive consent of the people should not be the base for a democratic government.

Vivekananda considered the man-making process as the mission of his life which according to him formed the central task of his life on earth.

Vivekananda always tried to focus on man because he realized very well that a country's future depends on its people. He therefore, urged the individuals not to remain a passive spectator of the activities of the government.

The man-making process of Swami Vivekananda encouraged all round development of the individual and reminds him of his duty towards the social and political life of the community.

It is important to mention here that Vivekananda did not feel it necessary to take governmental assistance in the building up of man-making process and laid special emphasis on self help. He asserted that we should not feel helpless because we are our own help and if we can not help ourselves there is none to help us. Society or government can only help the individual but real growth must come from people themselves.⁶

According to Vivekananda, to earn popular support the government and its institutions must emerge as a defender of individual freedom. He said that people will withdraw their support from the government when there is any encroachment on individual's freedom by the government.

Therefore, Vivekananda wanted the individuals to be vigilant about the activities of the government. He was of the view that people should replace the government when its institutions are injurious to their growth.

Instead of violent revolutionary methods, Vivekananda's man-making process emphasizes on the adoption of peaceful methods by the people for changing the government. He said that education plays a very important role in bringing peaceful change in the government because he believed that an educated society always stands for peaceful replacement of the government.

Thus the man-making process of Swami Vivekananda results in bringing constructive change in the society and gradual replacement of the degenerated government.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion it can be said that as a supporter of democracy Swami Vivekananda wanted to bring a qualitative change in it by the spread of man-making theories and education. He placed the individual at the heart of the society and stressed the need to ensure their active participation in the activities of the government.

Bringing qualitative change is necessary and positively important for any society to achieve moral and spiritual development of the people as a whole. Because the human being is sole responsible towards the change of society. When a qualitative change bring among people then it is ensured that the society will be changed. The followers' and the critics argued that it will be possible if we follow the principle of the man-making process as laid down by Swami Vivekananda. Hence the idea and principles of Vivekananda are still relevant in our society and may be relevant forever. Finally we may opine that we should cultivate his philosophy to establish harmony in the world in order to move in the path of progress and prosperity.

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