

Spiritualism or Materialism: A Philosophical Reflection of Swami Vivekananda's Thought

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The Asian Conference on Ethics, Religion & Philosophy 2018
Official Conference Proceedings

Abstract

Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902), a synergy of flamboyance and spiritual depth, is one of the most prominent figures of modern times. His spiritualism inheres a deep concern for the poor. In his various speeches and writings, he emphasized the need of the material development of the poor. There is a misconception that he glorified religion and spirituality and ignored the basic material needs of the poor. This paper is an attempt to examine such allegations and misconceptions, and delineates his philosophy in a comprehensive way, that synthesizes spirituality and materialism. It also deals with the problem of ideological categorization of spiritualism and materialism. According to Vivekananda human beings are not just physical and material beings that exist to satisfy their senses but spiritual beings as well. It is this spirituality that unites humanity across the world at a higher level. But, mere spirituality is not enough. Therefore, he underscores the need for material development also. He was well aware about the condition of suffering humanity, living in abject poverty. He was of the opinion that to solve this problem we need not only Oriental spiritualism but also Occidental materialism. Whereas some scholars consider spirituality and materialism as opposing domains, Vivekananda perceives them as complementary and mutually beneficial. In this context he appreciated the work-ethics of Japan and America, which he had witnessed during his visits to these countries. This inclusive approach is the need of the hour for an overall development of human civilization.

Keywords: Spiritualism, Materialism, Occidental, Oriental, Religion, Huamnity, Consumerism, Poverty, Liberation.

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“First bread and then religion. We stuff them too much with religion, when the poor fellows have been starving. No dogmas will satisfy the cravings of hunger.”

Swami Vivekananda, 12th November 1897 at Lahore

Introduction

Swami Vivekananda, who has been introduced by the Harvard University Professor JH Wright to the Chairman of the *World's Parliament of Religions* as one ‘who is more learned than all our learned professors put together’¹, is one of the most prominent figures of modern times for the whole world. His simple but elegant thoughts leave an indelible impact on human minds. As a synergy of flamboyance and spiritual depth, he is equally concerned with the material upliftment of the poor. In his various speeches and writings, he emphasizes the need of material growth as well as spiritual development of humanity. There is a misconception that Vivekananda glorified religion and spirituality and ignored the material needs of the poor. This paper is an attempt to examine such allegations and misconceptions and explains his philosophy in a comprehensive way, which synthesizes both spirituality and materialism.

Main Theme/Body

Generally, there are two different approaches to address the problems of human life, namely, *The Occidental Materialism* and *The Oriental Spiritualism*². Occidental or Western materialism is mostly centered on the fulfilment of material desires and the gratification of external senses. Their craze for material objects culminates in ‘*never ending and unsatisfied consumerism*’³. It neglects the essential spiritual and divine

¹ *The Life of Swami Vivekananda*, Vol. 1, 1979 : 406. It is a well known fact that Vivekananda reached Chicago after facing so many problems. In the *Parliament* when he explained his difficulties and said that he had no credentials, then Prof. Wright shot back, “To ask you, Swami, for credentials is like asking the sun to state its right to shine!” Ibid. p. 405.

² This classification should not be taken like a watertight division or in a very rigorous sense. There may be exceptions to it as some Western thinkers have talked about spirituality and some Eastern thinkers about materialism. But largely Western society is materialistic and Eastern is spiritualistic.

³ Human beings, who had been defined in Descartes’ *Rationalism* as ‘*I think, therefore I am.*’ (1997 : Discourse on The Method, Part 4, p.92) and in Existentialism of Albert Camus as ‘*I rebel, therefore I exist*’ now, have been converted into ‘mere consumers’. Herein, the defining characteristic of human being is ‘*I shop, therefore I am.*’ (originally given by American artist Barbara Kruger in 1987). Herbert Marcuse, a trenchant critic of consumerism writes that ‘The so-called consumer economy and the politics of corporate capitalism have created a second nature of man which ties him libidinally and aggressively to the commodity form. The need for possessing, consuming, handling, and constantly renewing the gadgets, devices, instruments, engines, offered to and imposed upon the people, for using these wares even at the danger of one's own destruction, has become a "biological" need...’ (2000 : 11). Espousing Marcuse’s view, Colin Cremin writes in the introduction of ‘*iCommunism*’ that the *Commerce has turned us into half-lives, shells of a fuller self, and in our identities we have become, if the clichéd phrase ‘I shop therefore I am’ has any truth to it, mirrors of the things desired and consumed. Objects that fill our homes and imaginations fit our identities like gloves because our natures are so bound and stunted by relations of exchange. The so-called consumer society has not liberated the senses so much as retarded them. Austerity threatens their suffocation.* (2012 : iii). These descriptions reflect the commodity fetishism of present society. According to Sandel the tragedy of present materialistic and consumerist world is that we have drifted from *having a market economy* to *being a market society*. He delineates this paradigm shift of human behaviour in his very significant

nature of human life. All scientific and material progress of the West could not address the main problems of suffering humanity. They failed to understand that internal happiness (*ananda*) is more important to the external pleasure (*sukha*). That's why there is internal dissatisfaction and frustration widely permeated in the West despite them being materially affluent. About this paradoxical tendency, Vivekananda writes :

Social life in the West is like a peal of laughter; but underneath, it is a wail. It ends in a sob. The fun and frivolity are all on the surface : really it is full of tragic intensity. Now here, it is sad and gloomy on the outside, but underneath are carelessness and merriment. (Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda 8, 1964 : 261-62, later on abbreviated as CWSV)

On the other hand, the Oriental spiritualism focuses on religious and spiritual development of human beings. Its aim is to arouse glory and divinity of humanity. And they did it even at the cost of basic material needs. They were busy in making religious monuments without realizing the urgency of the essential needs of life. In this pattern the basic needs of life were badly ignored which resulted in extreme poverty and starvation. The longing desire for liberation and heavenly bliss has neglected even the essential requirements of life. This is another extreme. In a debate with *Christianity*, titled *Religion Not The Crying Need Of India*, in Chicago on 20th Sept 1893, he warns:

..the crying evil in the East is not religion- they have enough religion—but it is bread that the suffering millions of burning India cry out for with parched throats. They ask us for bread, but we give them stones. It is an insult to a starving people to offer them religion; it is an insult to a starving man to teach him metaphysics.(CWSV 1, 2015 : 20)⁴

These two approaches are unable to address the problem of suffering humanity because they categorize human life in two different exclusive compartments whereas human life is a composite unity of the physical body (matter) and soul (consciousness or spirit). We have to understand human life in this inclusive way. In spite of all socio-political, economic and scientific progress around 800 millions (300 millions in India) of our brothers and sisters are still living like paupers today. It is the material development which can ease this type of severe poverty by providing basic necessities. But at the same time we should also understand that only material growth will not suffice. We need spirituality as well. It is the spirituality which shares a bond of

work *'What Money Can't Buy*. According to him *the notion that economics is a value-free science independent of moral and political philosophy has always been questionable. But the vaunting ambition of economics today makes this claim especially difficult to defend.* (2012 : 88)

⁴ It is interesting to know that Vivekananda emphasizes on the need of bread and butter rather than religion in most of his lectures and writings. He warned in a lecture delivered on 12th November 1897 at Lahore- "First bread and then religion. We stuff them too much with religion, when the poor fellows have been starving. No dogmas will satisfy the cravings of hunger."(CWSV3, 2015 : 432). This phenomenon of Vivekananda's philosophy was highlighted by Romain Rolland. According to Rolland, *he recalled Ramakrishna's rough words : 'Religion is not for empty bellies'. And waxing impatient with the intellectual speculation of an egoistic faith, he made it the first duty of religion ' to care for the poor and to raise them.'* (2012 : 19-20). The similar thesis had been propounded by Buddha much earlier, when he talked about the futility of metaphysics in the context of solving empirical problems and miseries of human lives.

oneness and humanity across the world. It binds humanity and engenders a sense of unity among people on a higher perspective. Material growth is necessary for the survival of the physical body but not sufficient because human beings are not just physical body, they are spirit also. Vivekananda explores the positivities and negativities of these two approaches. He envisages these two as inalienable elements of human life. Therefore, for a comprehensive development of human civilization he emphasizes the need of synthesis between them. During a lecture in New York in 1896, he expressed his wish in the following words:

...as man is acting on two planes, the spiritual and the material, waves of adjustment come on both planes. On the one side, of the adjustment of the material plane, Europe has mainly been the basis during modern times, and of the adjustment on the other, the spiritual plane, Asia has been the basis throughout the history of the world. Today, man requires one more adjustment on the spiritual plane; today, when material ideas are at the height of their glory and power, today when man is likely to forget his divine nature, through his growing dependence on matter, and is likely to be reduced a mere money- making machine, an adjustment is necessary. (CWSV 4, 2013 : 163)

Being a visionary thinker, Vivekananda does not perceive spiritualism and materialism as opposite domains but as complementary ones. He was quite concerned about the problems of poverty. He is of the opinion that to eradicate this poverty we need Western materialism because spirituality is incapable of removing the hunger of physical body. But at the same time West should learn Indian spiritualism because materialism could not quench the thirst of the spiritual self. For this reason he emphasizes the need of a synthesis between Indian spiritualism and Western materialism. He opines:

Too early religious advancement of the Hindus and that super fineness in everything which made them cling to higher alternatives, have reduced them to what they are. The Hindus have to learn a little bit of materialism from the west and teach them a little bit of spirituality. (CWSV 6, 2013 : 132)⁵

Realizing the urgency of both materialism and spiritualism, he further states in a lecture :

..when the Oriental wants to learn about machine-making he should sit at the feet of the Occidental and learn from him. When the Occident wants to learn about the spirit, about God, about the soul, about the meaning and the mystery of this universe, he must sit at the feet of the Orient to learn. (CWSV 4, 2013 : 165)⁶

⁵ One should not construe that material and technical growth are exclusively confined to the West. Vivekananda was very much impressed by the Japan in all spheres. Praising the progress of Japan, in a conversation with Shri Priya Nath Sinha, he wished that some unmarried graduates should be sent there for technical education and use their knowledge to the best account for India (CWSV 5, 2015 : 372).

⁶ The bio-polarity of the Orient(East) and Occident (West) has been expressed in different ways in Vivekananda's works. In the context of these expressions some clarifications are needed here. In his article '*Vivekananda's Western Message From The East*' Dermot Killingley says that in India, the content of this polarity was drawn largely from its context in the discourse of the British in India, who

It is clear that Vivekananda endorses the synthesis between Eastern spiritualism and Western materialism as both are incomplete or even 'dangerous' in the absence of each other. Generally spirituality represents the divine and internal aspect of human life, whereas materialism represents physical and external aspects. The aim of materialism is to conquer external 'nature' by scientific and material progress whereas the aim of spiritualism is to know 'inner self' by contemplating on 'the real nature of the self'. Both play a crucial role in one's life. The problem arises only when we make an exclusive demarcation between these two and fail to understand human nature in its totality. In the present era of consumerism, materialism has become the 'internal' part of one's life and spiritualism has been converted into 'external' rituals and dogmas. This phenomenon is also wrong. In an interview- '*The Abroad and the Problems at Home*' Madras, February 1897, *The Hindu*, he said :

..the combination of the Greek mind represented by the external European energy added to the Hindu spirituality would be an ideal society for India.....India has to learn from Europe the conquest of external nature, and Europe has to learn from India the conquest of internal nature. Then there will be the ideal humanity which has conquered both the natures, the external and the internal. We have developed one phase of humanity, and they another. It is the union of the two that is wanted. (CWSV 5, 2015 : 216)

Since human life has two aspects in the form of a physical body and spiritual self, Vivekananda emphasizes the exchanges of these two because without such an exchange each civilization will be incomplete. He laments that to '*... care only for spiritual liberty and not for social liberty is a defect, but the opposite is still a greater defect. Liberty of both soul and body is to be striven for.*' (CWSV 6, 2013 : 95) As a *Neo-Vedanti*, Vivekananda interprets spirituality in a humanistic way, which gives emphasis on basic needs of human life in this empirical world. As a spiritual humanist he focuses on the dignity (by fulfilling material needs) and divinity (by arousing spiritual fire) of human beings through his various writings and speeches. For him human beings are not just physical beings that exist to satisfy their sensual cravings but spiritual beings as well. As he opines in a lecture, delivered in London, titled – '*The Necessity of Religion*':

differentiated themselves from 'Natives', 'Asiatics' or 'Orientalists', and differentiated their own homeland from 'the East'. In each case the term implying alienness refers of course primarily to India and its inhabitants. But the East or the Orient could also include places as far to the east as Japan or as far west as Morocco. It was this vagueness of location which enabled Keshab Chandra Sen (in his speech '*Jesus Christ : Europe and Asia*') to claim affinity with Jesus, who in traditional terms was a Yavana – a superior kind of Mleccha. Killingley further says that when this polarity was adopted in Indian discourse, in English and in Indian languages (to some extent), its connotations of the familiar and the alien were not simply reversed. Though the East could include the physical and social environment which was familiar to the English-speaking Indian, it also included much that was alien. At the same time, what Indians meant by the West was not such a vague and heterogeneous area as the East was in British discourse; it was still primarily the English-speaking world. Since the attitudes, values and assumptions of this world had to a greater or lesser extent been accepted by English-speaking Indians, together with much of the knowledge that marked a cultured inhabitant of it, the West was not alien to them. (Radice, 1998 : pp.139-40). This has been well exemplified in Nirad Chaudhuri's (1997) account of the three places which were familiar to him in his up-country childhood in the early 20th century, his home town Kishorganj (now in Bangladesh), Calcutta and London.

The lower the organization, the greater the pleasure in the senses. Very few men can eat a meal with the same gusto as a dog or a wolf..... The lower types of humanity in all nations find pleasure in the senses, while the cultured and educated find it in thought, in philosophy, in arts and sciences. Spirituality is still a higher plane. (CWSV 2, 1968 : 66)

Here spirituality is not intended to underestimate the power of this world's human beings but to make them realize their real inner strength. Vivekananda was well aware about the shallow type of religious preaches in which human life has been interpreted as a puppet in the hands of God. In this process they have lost their dignity for the sake of Godly bliss, which had also killed the spirit of social service. It is important here to mention the view of his batch mate Brajendranath Seal who wrote in April 1907 in *Prabuddha Bharat* that John Stuart Mill's *Three Essays on Religion* had upset Vivekananda's first boyish theism and the easy optimism which he had imbibed from the outer circle of the *Brahmo Samaj*. (Cf. A. Raghuramaraju, 2014 : 4) This book contains three essays namely, *Nature, Utility of Religion and Theism*. In this book Mill talks about human problems and sufferings and tries to give a rational explanation for the need of "*Religion of Humanity*" (1969 : 109). He warns us :

If religious belief be indeed so necessary to mankind, as we are continually assured that it is, there is great reason to lament, that the intellectual grounds of it should require to be backed by moral bribery or subornation of the understanding.(1969 : 71)

As a revolutionary thinker Vivekananda centres his religious thoughts on the welfare of humanity. He practices rituals but not at the cost of humanity. He worships God, but not at the cost of social service. For him service to man is service to God. He roars that I don't care for liberation, I would rather go to a hundred thousand hells, doing good to others (silently) like the spring, this is my religion (CWSV 7, 2013 : 470). By focusing on the humanistic aspects of religion and emphasizing service over dogma, he attempts to infuse rationality and social responsibility into religion. As Karan Singh remarks :

He thundered against the 'Kitchen religion', the ridiculous taboos and restrictive customs that had overlaid the tremendous *Vedantic* truths. He reaffirmed not only the divinity of God but also the inherent divinity of man. A special feature of his teachings was his keen social conscience and his intense emphasis on service to the poor and the down-trodden, the sick and the hungry.(2014 : 28)

As a *Practical-Vedanti*, Vivekananda is very much concerned with the practical needs of human life. For this he makes a clarion call to the masses and urges them for action and not to be dependent upon divine fate. Through his revolutionary ideas he tries to free human beings from the pomposity of hell-heaven, God, salvation etc. He is a humanitarian philosopher. Like Buddha⁷, especially like his ideal of *Bodhisattava*, he

⁷ As he said in a lecture, delivered in London on *Practical Vedanta IV* (18th Nov. 1896) – "I would like to see moral men like Gautama Buddha, who did not believe in a personal God or a personal soul,yet was ready to lay down his life for anyone, and worked all his life for the good of all." (CWSV 2, 1968 : 352)

never worked for his personal salvation. His goal is to serve the suffering humanity, that humanity whose practical problems have been completely ignored for the sake of utopian ideals of religion. They are forced to live in destitution. His life-mission is to ease the pain of suffering humanity rather than teaching them metaphysics and religion. He scolds those who talk about the futility of material growth. Realising the urgency of material development, he wrote to Alasinga Perumal, titled -‘*To My Brave Boys*’ from New York on 19th November 1894-

We talk foolishly against material civilisation. The grapes are sour. Even taking all that foolishness for granted, in all India there are, say, a hundred thousand really spiritual men and women. Now, for the spiritualisation of these, must three hundred millions be sunk in savagery and starvation? Why should any starve?.....It was due to the ignorance of material civilisation..... Material civilisation, nay, even luxury, is necessary to create work for the poor. Bread! Bread! I do not believe in a God, who can not give me bread here, giving me eternal bliss in heaven! Pooh! India is to be raised, the poor are to be fed, education is to be spread, and the evil of the priestcraft is to be removed..... More bread, more opportunity for everybody. (CWSV 4, 2013 : 375)⁸

It is strange but true that a strong materialist (and industrialist) is more effective in solving the problems of a society than a weak spiritualist (and ascetic). Vivekananda was well aware about this fact. That’s why when he met to Jamsetji Tata (1839-1904) while he was on the way to the World’s Parliament of Religions in July 1893, on board the steamship *Empress of India* from Yokohama (Japan) to Vancouver (Canada) he urged him to start scientific and industrial research institutes in India rather than seeking money for temples⁹. The mission of his life was to serve the suffering humanity irrespective of caste, creed, nationality and ideology and he did not hesitate in asking help from anywhere and everywhere to fulfil it. He embraces all good things from wherever they come and utilizes them for the welfare of humanity. On one hand, he appreciates the spiritual richness of India and material growth of the West but on the other hand, he laments at the material poverty of India and spiritual bankruptcy of the West. He stresses on the need to exchange the positive aspects of both traditions and discard the negative ones. As an Anglo-American novelist Christopher Isherwood observes :

⁸ This rebellious exhortation of Vivekananda had a world-wide impact. In his article, titled ‘*He is Dear to the People of USSR*’ Russian Indologist Rostilav Rybakov has recalled that how Leo Tolstoy was influenced by Vivekananda’s ideas. Tolstoy had marked in his diary ‘*I was reading Vivekananda again and again. How much there is in common between the thoughts of his and mine.*’ (Cf. Jyotirmayananda, 1988 : 180). Appreciating Vivekananda’s concern for poor, Rybakov comments:

The essence of Vivekananda’s religion is the service to the people. ‘I do not believe in God or religion which can not wipe the widow’s tears or bring a peace of bread to the orphan’s mouth.’ he said . His doctrine was focused on man. .. – how consonant his idea is with Maxim Gorky’s words spoken at about the same time.(Cf. Jyotirmayananda, 1988 : 180-81).

⁹ This incident was comprehensively discussed in Sankariprasad Basu's book ‘*Vivekananda O Samkalin Bharatbarsha*’ Vol 5, chapter 32, pp 239-66, (Cf. Shuddhidananda, 2014 : 267, 284, 301) In a letter written in 1898, Jamsetji had requested Vivekananda to take the charge of the Indian Institute of Science. Former President of India, APJ Kalam has highly appreciated Vivekananda’s concern and interest in the growth of the scientific spirit in India. (Ibid, 302)

Vivekananda had two messages to deliver : one to the East, the other to the West. In the United States and in England, he preached the universality of religious truth. In India...he preferred to stress the ideal of social service. To each he tried to give what was most lacking. (Cf. Shuddhidananda, 2014 : 227-28.)

These statements reflect the vision of Vivekananda, where he envisages the need of a constructive dialogue between Indian spiritualism and Western materialism. Whereas some scholars consider spirituality and materialism as opposing domains and make categorical demarcation between them, Vivekananda perceives them as complementary and mutually beneficial. That's why he tries to strike a balance between Indian spiritualism and Western materialism for the sake of human welfare. He made religion and spirituality human-centric rather than God-centric and apprehends materialism as a tool for rendering service rather than money-making machine or ideology. He is dead against the tendency of accumulation of material wealth. In a letter titled '*Our Duty to the Masses*' he writes to the Maharaja of Mysore- "They alone live who live for others, the rest are more dead than alive." (CWSV 4 :371)¹⁰. This altruistic approach of his teachings works as a foundation for the comprehensive development of human civilization. In the era of post-post-modernism where every ideology is short-lived, the humanistic thought of Vivekananda still appeals and guides us. His revolutionary ideas are continuously inspiring world level institutions also. In this context, it will be significant to mention the address of the Director-General of UNESCO Mr. Federico Mayor, that he delivered on 8th October 1993 in Paris. In his address he was struck by the similarity between UNESCO's objectives and the thoughts propounded by Vivekananda around a hundred years ago (Cf. Shuddhidananda, 2014 : 52). Observing the global impact of Vivekananda's appeal well known Indologist AL Basham comments :

I believe that Vivekananda will always be remembered in the world's history because he virtually initiated what the late Dr. C. E. M. Joad once called 'the counter-attack from the East.'he was the first Indian religious teacher to make an impression outside India. (Jyotirmayananda, 1988 : 157)

Before concluding, an important point needs attention. There is a general perception that the aim of Vivekananda was to establish the superiority of the Indian spiritualism in the West. There are some places in his writings where he tacitly talks about this 'aim'. But on studying his works thoroughly we find that it is not true. When Vivekananda went to Chicago to participate in the *World's Parliament of Religions* he had two things in mind - first to know about the scientific and material development of the West (especially America) and how it can be beneficial to remove the material poverty of India; and second, to make the West aware about the religious and spiritual legacy of India. This was well elucidated by Beckerlegge in his brilliant work, *Swami Vivekananda's Legacy to Service* (2006). His intention was not to prove

¹⁰ It is well known fact that American business magnate John Rockefeller (1839-1937) was very reluctant towards philanthropic works in his earlier days. But after meeting Vivekananda in 1894 he donated enormous amounts of money for public welfare. Echoing the thoughts of Vivekananda, he says- " There is more to life than the accumulation of money. Money is only a trust in one's hand. To use it improperly is a great sin. The best way to prepare for the end of life is to live for others." (Cf. Burke 1, 2013 : 487-88.)

superiority of India there. According to Beckerlegge *Vivekananda's first project was centred upon the goal of addressing the needs of India's poor and was typically addressed in the terms of the language of 'service as worship'- the worship of Narayana within every being and thus within the poor and downtrodden.* In this context, it is worth mentioning here the conversation between Vivekananda and K S Ramaswami, where he opines that :

To reach *Narayana* you must serve *Daridra Narayanas* (God of the poor)
- the starving millions of India. (*Reminiscences of Swami Vivekananda*,
1961 : 111)¹¹

According to Beckerlegge, his second project *came to the fore in 1895 and 1896, centred upon the goal of utilizing India's spiritual resources to fill a religious vacuum in the West and was typically expressed in terms of the language of Practical Vedanta and with increasing appeal to the Advaita* (2006 : 247). After observing the vastness and complexities of human life Vivekananda states that we should appreciate and accept good ideas from wherever they come and discard bad even if they are ours. He criticises Western people for their craze of material things, their consumeristic life styles but at the same time he appreciates their education, sense of cleanliness, safety of women and their concerns for poor. On the other hand he vehemently deplores the hypocrisies of Indian religious practices where some people do not allow other even to touch them ("Don't touch, don't touch is the only phrase that plays upon their lips" CWSV 5, 2015 : 27)¹², discrimination against women, prevalence of abject poverty (due to mass level inertia) and utopian desire for liberation at the cost of basic amenities, but he lauds the spiritual richness of Indian tradition, the virtue of religious acceptance and family values. He stated in a letter to Haripada from Chicago, 28th December 1893 :

As regards spirituality, the Americans are far inferior to us, but their society is far superior to ours. We will teach them our spirituality and assimilate what is best in their society. (CWSV 5, 2015 : 27)¹³

That's why at some places he criticizes the wrong practices of Hindu religion and Indian culture more severely than the Western consumerism.

¹¹ According to TN Chaturvedi (former CAG of India), Mahatma Gandhi not only popularised the phrase '*Daridra Narayana*' which was first time used by Swamiji but throughout his life he strictly practiced what he preached publicly. (Cf. Shuddhidananda, 2014 : 245-46). Acknowledging Vivekananda's concern about the poverty of Indians, Sri Aurobindo (1872-1950) says- "Vivekananda accepted Shankara's philosophy with modifications, the chief of them being *Daridra- Narayana-Seva* which is a mixture of Buddhist compassion and modern philanthropy." (Cf. Raghuramaraju, 2007 : 44)

¹² Vivekananda was very much upset by the practice of untouchability as once he said *that he wished that he was a pariah.* (Cf. Raychaudhuri, 1988 : 250, 322 , Sankariprasad Basu, 1992, 3 : 200).

¹³ Appreciating Vivekananda's erudite understanding of East and West, Raychaudhuri writes- He explored the fundamental proneness of eastern and western civilizations, accepting the simplistic dichotomy which still survives as a respectable paradigm.....The dichotomy he projected was at one level a theoretical statement of observed facts, not a claim of cultural superiority. (1988 : 344-45)

Conclusion

The only mission of Vivekananda's life is to serve humanity (in general) and to remove material poverty of India (in particular). For him the question is not about spiritualism or materialism but to make the world better by alleviating the problems of suffering humanity. And he did it wholeheartedly in the short span (12th January 1863 – 04th July 1902) that life provided him. The beauty of his spiritualistic philosophy is that instead of focusing on personal salvation it showcases a deep concern with the miseries of others.¹⁴ He extends his individual-self to the world-self. He visualises the rich Indian tradition of world-family (*Vasudhaiva- Kutumbakam*)¹⁵ where both spiritualism and materialism embraces each other. He is a champion of synthesis and in the context of spiritualism and materialism he did it marvellously.

¹⁴ A monk holds his *Math* in high reverence. But when plague broke out in Calcutta in April 1898 and Government effort seems to be inadequate then Vivekananda came down from Darjeeling, where he had gone to recuperate. When his brother-monk remonstrated, "Swamiji, where will the funds come from?" he thundered back, "Why, we shall sell the newly purchased *Math* grounds, if necessary." By this incident one can imagine Vivekananda genuine passion to serve the humanity. (Cf. RC Majumdar, 2013 : 66)

¹⁵ "*Ayam nijah paro veti ganana laghuchetasam.*

Udarcharitanam tu Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam." (Cf. Narayan Ram Acharya, 1995 : 36).

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