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## Vivekananda's Concept of Social Reform

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### **Abstract:**

Swami Vivekananda was a great thinker and reformer of India. He was an Indian Philosopher of the modern times. He introduced Indian Philosophy of Vedanta. He focussed on the practicality of the theory and believed in Karmayoga. Vivekananda applied Philosophy of Advaita Vedanta to build humanity and spirituality. He believed in learning from the past mistakes and going forward from the good. He was against the "Caste system" and the "Practice of untouchability". Vivekananda believed in 'Gender Equality' and 'Education of Women' as an instrument for human betterment. According to him, strength is goodness, weakness is sin. So he emphasised on the proper care of the body and healthy development. He stressed on reorientation of the Education System and the integrated development of the human personality in the order: body, mind and heart. He wanted to abolish poverty and remove mass illiteracy. Vivekananda wanted to bring social change through Spirituality and Vedanta.

**Keywords:** Advaitin- A follower or proponent of the Advaita Vedānta tradition, Jnana Yoga- yoga of the mind or intellect, Puranic- Derived from Purana, Karmayoga- The path to reach moksha (spiritual liberation) through work ,Daridra-Narayana- service to the poor is equivalent in importance and piety to service to God, Bhakta- A devotee of God Bhakti- Devotion, Vedantists-Follower of Vedanta, Rishis- Saints

### **Introduction:**

Swami Vivekananda was a great thinker and reformer of India. He did not teach religion as a water-tight compartment. He treated religion as co-extensive with life and wanted it to influence the social and economic ideals of the people and their daily conduct and activity. According to Vivekananda, theory must be practical and if it is not, it has no value. The Vedanta, therefore, as

a religion must be intensely practical. The ideals of religion must cover the whole aspect of life, and it must enter into our thoughts and be put more and more into practice. Vivekananda called his religion Practical Vedanta. For Vivekananda, both Socialism and Practical Vedanta have some common elements like Democratic Socialism and Gandhian Socialism. Intellectually, Vivekananda was an Advaitin and a votary of Jnana yoga but emotionally he was a Bhakta deeply influenced by the dualistic interpretation of the Vedanta. His heart was moved by what he saw and responded to the overwhelming need of his people for economic and social betterment. He got very angry at the social system when he came into contact with the Indian masses, their poverty, illiteracy, superstitions and social degradation. His distress at what he saw was heightened by his Puranic concept of Bhakti which identified love for God with love for all human beings. His belief in Karmayoga gave him the strength to look up to incessant work in the service of the poor as the motivation for all work. He was convinced that God was not someone to be sought for from outside this world. In fact, God was manifested in all human beings. He was sure that serving was the best way of finding him.

### **Subject Matter:**

Vivekananda spent his life on this earth seeing missionaries who would fight as soldiers for the abolition of poverty and for the service of the Daridra-Narayana as their way of worship of God. Vivekananda's concept of social reform showed itself in his formulation of the ideal of the patriotism. He was immensely proud of the country's Philosophical and Cultural heritage but on the other side he was also fully aware of the disastrous results it had produced on the condition of the Indian masses. His patriotism was the great love for his people. According to him, Patriotism needs three things for its practical implementation. One is the passionate love for masses, second is the finding of practical solution for their problem instead of reforms on paper, and the third is the strength of will to overcome the obstructions to the implementation of these solutions. He however, did not believe in big change but he recognised that the past was a mixture of both good and evil and one should learn from the past mistakes and go forward from the good. Vivekananda's concept of social reform covered the Social system and the need for its reconstruction to enable the masses to play their rightful role in society. He believed in retaining the nation's pride in its past and the self respect it engendered. He was most concerned with the institution of caste which he disliked intensely but continued to exist because of the mistaken

notion of reforms that caste was a religious institution. Vivekananda stoutly denied the thesis of religious sanction for the Caste system. The Caste system is opposed to the religion of the Vedanta. Caste is a social custom and all great preachers have tried to break it down. The fact is that Vivekananda was denouncing caste even if it was based on merit and shows how his Vedanta was moving him in the direction of what have called Vedantic socialism. Vivekananda was staunch opponent of privilege in any form and took caste as the supreme illustration of the doctrine of privilege. There were bound to be variations in the physical, mental and spiritual abilities of different human beings, but this gave no right for special privilege for those who had more of any such ability. None can be Vedantists and at the same time admit of privilege to anyone, either mental, physical or spiritual. The same power is in every man, in one manifesting itself more and in the other less, the potential is in everyone. The work of the Vedanta is to break down all these privileges. The practical Vedanta preached more radical in its implications for human relations and its relevance for India today is even greater than when he preached it so many years ago. Vivekananda was also a strong advocate of giving women their rightful place in the society by removing their backwardness. He started a math for women disciples. He indicated the scriptures that stated that women were not competent for knowledge and devotion. On the contrary, during Vedic times, women like Maitreyi, Gargi and others had taken the place of Rishis through their skills in discussing about the Brahman. According to him “Daughters should be supported and educated with as much care as the sons”. Unless the conditions of women are bettered in India, the country will remain backward. He wanted to provide equal educational opportunities to women as well. It should be for them to choose their role in life and not for men to decide their role. Thus, Vivekananda used his Vedantic Philosophy to drive home his advocacy of equality and independence for women, giving them education, removing their backwardness and giving them the opportunity to play their rightful role in society.

Vivekananda believed that Education was an instrument for human betterment. He pleaded for Universalisation of literacy, development and of mass education. He wanted a thorough reorientation of the educational system, in order to make it an integrated man making and character building system, with emphasis on pride in national heritage, love for the masses, self confidence, strength and will power. He also laid stress on the proper care of the body and

healthy development of one's physique. He was not satisfied with an education that merely looked to the development of the body and mind of the student. He attached the greatest importance to the development of compassion and fellow feeling for the common man. Vivekananda also laid stress on the development of fearlessness in the young, because for him fear is the greatest enemy of development. For him, strength is goodness, weakness is sin. Education should free the individual from the fear of the powers that be or of the unknown.

Vivekananda also emphasised the importance of the teacher winning his pupil through personal interest and affection and building up his self confidence. His own life was a wonderful example of what an ideal teacher can do to a difficult disciple. He knew that self confidence was more than half the secret of success in life and it required careful and sympathetic nurturing at an early age. The prime goal of education should be to educate the masses particularly, the rural masses. Use of the intellect rather than accumulation of information, concentration rather than memorising, integrated development of the human personality in the ascending scale of the body, mind and heart, cultivation of fearlessness in pursuit of truth and compassion, science instead of superstition and absorption of spirited message of the Vedanta that all man are divine and it only needs will, strength and effort to realize their divinity is the message to those who seek education. Vivekananda was not a blind patriot nor was he an upholder of the status-quo in social institutions. He wanted the individuals to awaken themselves and be assertive. He knew that social change could not come without the stimulus of individual thought, so he advocated an Educational system that would develop the thinking power. He was also aware that intellectual development may stimulate change. He knew that change would not get implemented without organisation and character. It was his love for the country and the desire to see the change in the right direction that led him to undertake a fearless analysis of its national weaknesses of character and organisation.

Vivekananda gave a number of wise and practical suggestions for promoting the efficient working of the organizations which he wanted his countrymen to build. He writes "Skilful management lies in giving every man work after his own heart". The thought that Vivekananda presented on organizational efficiency, hold as good today as when it was formulated. According to him first make the people of the country stand on their legs by rousing their inner power, let

them learn to have good food and clothes and plenty of enjoyment then tell them how to be free from this bondage of enjoyment. If their material wants are not removed by the rousing of intense activity, none will listen to words of spirituality. He wanted material betterment first and was content to bring religion later. That is why he called his religion practical Vedanta or Vedantic socialism. He was a believer in human development, material development and the goal of development was the perfection of man. His stress was on the individual rather than on society. But he was not thinking of individual in isolation but always talking of the individual in society and in relation to society. According to Vivekananda development should include both materiality and spirituality. He believed in growth and evolution.

### **Conclusion:**

Vivekananda's merit was that he campaigned for the abolition of poverty and the same is being practiced today. He pleaded for the removal of mass illiteracy and today it has become a part of the Government's programme. He spoke up for the up-liftment of backward classes and today the same has become the general slogan for all political parties.

Vivekananda was ahead of his time in his concern for social change. His concept of social reform was based on the conduct and character of the Indian masses and rousing of spirituality through the new interpretation of the Hindu concept of Vedanta. Vivekananda wanted special changes but the engine of social change must have its proper fuel. This will only come from Spirituality and the Vedanta which proclaimed the innate divinity in man and the sameness it gave all men as the basis for the social ethic of non-exploitation and universal human welfare.

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