Research Paper

Swami Vivekanandas's s Perspectives on Sin across Sanatan Culture

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Abstract
This paper views an extensive analysis on the nature ,meaning and consequences of sin and its effect on people.It also covers various issues and blind beliefs practiced in society .In religious traditions across the world, sin is understood as awillful rebellion or disobedience against god.
Hence , this paper would unveil the nature of sin with references from Bhagwad Gita, Upanishads and Puraans.Further it takes consideration on Swami Vivekananda's interpretation on sin which is mainly based on social responsibility.It has also raised certain issues like poverty, illiteracy and untouchability,which according to Vivekananda are sins .Therefore, his logical dissent in this regard is discussed.

Keywords: *Sin, religion ,Vivekananda, God ,nature*
Sin is intentional transgression of divine law. Hinduism does not view sin as a crime against God, but as an act against dharma- moral order and one's own self. It is thought natural, if unfortunate, that young souls acts, for they are living in nescience, avidya, the darkness of ignorance (SatguruSivayaSubramuniyaswami 493)[1].

I. Introduction

Understanding the nature of sin is a universal concern. In religious traditions across the world, the word sin is understood as a willful rebellion or disobedience against what has been laid out by god. Almost all the religions have their own versions of sin, sinners and redemption. The mind, body and soul are the three aspects of human consciousness. This is acknowledged by all religions.

Any deed of omission which is opposed to Dharma, God's will, religious practice, and moral rules expressed or laid down in the sacred texts, may be included within the range of '*paap*'. The Hindu word for sin means any act which is irreligious, immoral, bad or wicked. Some of the semantic cognates of *paap* are *pataka* (sin); *apunya* (unholy); *akushala* (bad); *ashubha*, (inauspicious); *kilbisa*, *kilbikh* (evil); *dosha* (defilement), *duskritiya* (crime) and *apavitra* (impure).

The etymology of *paap* is obscure. The word *pataka* is derived from the root word '*pat*', to fall, physically or in the moral sense. Sin is what causes a fall from the religious, moral and spiritual position. The nature of which may vary from tradition to tradition culture to culture. Violation of or opposition to a prescribed religious or moral law causes not only fall but also bondage. Therefore, it is said that which binds or fetters (*pasayati*) and causes downfall (*patayati*) is called *paap* or sin. This seems to be the best soteriological definition of *paap* in the context of India's religious experience which has placed supreme value on spiritual release (*mokhsa*). It is obvious that the idea of *paap* is associated on the one hand with the relation of man with man and on the other with man's transcendental quest. All that leads an individual away from the ultimate reality constitutes *paap*.

There are three major religious alternatives in explaining evil, stated by the pantheistic, dualistic and monotheistic religions. Pantheistic religions regard evil as ultimately unreal. Human suffering is a product of spiritual ignorance gathered in previous lives and distributed in the present one according to the dictates of *karma*. In the dualistic religions, good and evil are two eternal and rival principles. Neither has created the other one and each acts according to its own nature. In the monotheistic religions, evil has a personal identity. Its source is a being that has fallen from an initial good status as a result of misusing freedom of will.

The problem of evil is a touchstone of any religion. From ones direct confrontation with evil it results suffering, and thus endless questions about the meaning of life can be interpreted. That is why all religions have to give a proper answer regarding the origin, nature and end of evil.

Evil, in a general context, is the absence or opposite of that which is ascribed as being good. Often, evil is used to denote profound immorality. In certain religious contexts, evil has been described as a supernatural force. Definitions of evil vary, as does the analysis of its motives. However, elements that are commonly associated with evil involve unbalanced behavior involving expediency, selfishness, ignorance, or neglect.

In the *Advaita* school of Vedanta, this problem is dealt by Shankaracharya in his commentary on the *Brahma Sutras*, "No partiality and cruelty can be charged against God because of His taking other factors into consideration" (2.1.34-36)[2]. Shankaracharya's commentary explains that God cannot be charged with partiality or cruelty (injustice) on account of his taking the factors of virtuous and vicious actions (*karma*) performed by an individual in previous lives. If an individual experiences pleasure or pain in this life, it is due to virtuous or vicious action (*karma*) done by that individual in a past life.

In cultures with Buddhist spiritual influence, both good and evil are perceived as part of an antagonistic duality that itself must be overcome through achieving *Sunyata* meaning emptiness in the sense of recognition of good and evil being two opposing principles but not a reality, emptying the duality of them, and achieving oneness.

In cultures with an Abrahamic religious influence, evil is usually perceived as the dualistic antagonistic opposite of good, in which good should prevail and evil should be defeated. Sin is viewed in terms of its effects on relationships, both among people and between people and God. "Sin is seen as the refusal to follow God's plan and the desire to be like God" (Genesis 3:5).

Similarly, the in Islam word *Jurm* is often considered to be a synonym of *dhanb* for it is used to describe some of the sins. In the *Quran*, the word mostly appears in the form of *mujrim*, one who commits a *jurm*. These individuals are described in the *Quran* as having arrogance towards the believers. The *Quran* says that, "God forgiveth not (the sin of) joining other Gods to Him; but He forgiveth whom He pleaseth other sins that this: one who joines other gods with God hath strayed far, far away" (4:116)[3].

Hence, the general pattern in Eastern religions is to consider evil as the effect of spiritual ignorance. This perspective is valid for most of the Eastern religious thinkers that followed the period of the Upanishads. The only possibility of escaping suffering is to know the true nature of things and so to escape from the dominion of ignorance, *karma* and reincarnation. In the dualistic religions, evil is coeternal with good. Matter and embodied existence are evil, and our ignorance keeps one from attaining perfection as angelic beings.

According to the Western belief, evil is neither created nor a natural or necessary element. It is a parasite state that perpetuates itself by misusing God's good resources and by following a wrong direction. It is the illness of beings that are no longer in communion with God. Therefore, world religions contradict each other in explaining the meaning of evil.

Sin or *Paap* in Hinduism and its Repentance *(Anutapa)*

To start with Hinduism, it is a way of life. It considers that good and bad actions performed during the journey of life constitute sin. Hence, Sin is a term used mainly in a religious context to describe an act that violates a moral rule, or the state of having committed such a violation.

It presents itself as the *Sanatan Dharma*, the everlasting pattern of life. Hinduism gives us a broad concept of sin. It is directly related to the doctrine of *karma*. Sin determines ones destiny and *karma* becomes the channel to reward and punish one in this life.

The term sin or *paap* is often described as actions that create negative *Karma*. Every good act brings its own reward so as every crime or wrong act brings its own punishment. The law of retribution operates both in this life as well as carried over in the next.

The word *paap* is generally used for sin that refers to a doctrine which deals emancipation of a soul it refers to the transgression of religious morals. SatguruSivaya, explains in his book, "Sin is an adharmic course (Unrighteous) of action which automatically brings negative consequences" (493)[4].

According to Hinduism, every individual is composed of three *gunas* or qualities called *Sattava, Rajas* and *Tamas*. The concept originated in Samkhya philosophy, but now a key concept in various schools of Hindu philosophy. These three *gunas*, according to this worldview, have always been and continue to be present in all things and beings in the world. These three *gunas* are called *sattva* (goodness, constructive, harmonious), *rajas* (passion, active, confused), and *tamas* (darkness, destructive, chaotic) rule the lives of people. All three *gunas* are present in everyone and everything, it is the proportion that is different, according to Hindu worldview, and the interplay of these *gunas* defines the character of someone or something, its nature and it determines the progress of life.

In some contexts, it may mean a subdivision, species, kind, quality, or an operational principle or tendency of something or someone. In human behavior studies, *Guna* means personality, innate nature and

psychological attributes of an individual. There is no single word in English language to express the exact the concept of *guna*. The usual, but approximate translation is 'quality'.

These qualities combine in different ways in different people. According to the ratio of these Gunas in ones personality, sins are committed. A *Satvic* personality refrains from sin. The *Rajas* temperament causes one to commit sin. The quality of *Rajas* impels people to indulge in certain types of actions that are harmful. In Bhagavad Gita Lord Krishna says:

It is desire, it is anger, born of
rajo-guna, all-consuming and most evil.
Know this to be the enemy here on earth (3. 37)[5].

Bhagavad Gita the most important sacred book of the Hindus explains the nature of sin. All defects of thought, speech and action can be classed as sin. It describes Sin as a defect (*dosh*) or a stain that causes individuals to fall. It is an offence or injury against the order of the world or the indulgence of the senses in harmful action.

Man alone creates sin and can win the release from it. Thus, according to Bhagavad Gita, sin does not originate but it is an individual who commits sin and becomes sinner due to temptations of pleasure that are caused by wrongful desires.

Any thought, speech, action, association that degrades and disturbs a human being mentally and physically is considered as sinful. It is so because any such ruination is an impediment to final emancipation of the soul. It also disturbs the equilibrium of a society in which an individual lives.

The concept of sin is knit together with the doctrine of transmigration. The doctrine of transmigration of soul has a deep root in Hindu religious thinking. Why should a man be good? Why should he observe religious practices? The answer to these questions is that these are the mean to release oneself from transmigration. Hence, when an individual does good act he releases himself from the cycle of rebirth.

N. Macnicol's quote from the *Katha Upanishad*, "Some enter the womb in order to have a body, as organic beings, others go into the inorganic matter, according to their work and according to their knowledge" (5:7 203)[6]. An individual soul attains emancipation by performing good deeds and remains entangled in the cycle of rebirth. Hence, it is taken for granted that, ones deeds determine the kind of birth.

The second verse from *Chhandogya Upanishad* throws more light on the doctrine when it says, "Those, whose conduct has been good, will quickly attain good birth, the birth of a Brahmin, or a Kshatriya, or a Vaisya. But those whose conduct has been evil, will quickly attain an evil birth, the birth of a dog, or a hog, or a chandala" (7:10 160)[7].

Karma determines what type of body a soul will take in its transmigration. Man is the maker of his destiny. If he performs good deeds, he will attain good rebirth, if he does not he will attain lower type of rebirths. Swami Abhedananda further explains the law of *karma*:

The law of causation or law of *Karma* includes the law that the like produces the like, or that every action must be followed by a reaction of similar nature. . . . Motives, desires, thoughts and other mental functions being subject to the same law, produce, *good, bad* or *mixed* results according to the nature of these mental activities. As all the mental activities determine the character of the individual ego. . . (10-11)[8].

An individual who believes in the law of *karma* is free to choose and is responsible for all the good and bad result he receives. Accumulation of bad *Karma* results in the state of rebirth. The transmigration of soul is the result of this. It is the aspiration of individual to attain the state of birthlessness where his soul attains liberation from being born again and again and ultimately merges with *Brahman*. It is in this sense Shri Krishna preaches to Arjuna in Gita:

Let a man raise his self, by his Self,
let him not debase his Self; he alone,
indeed, is his own friend, he alone is
his own enemy (6:5)[9].

Therefore, man can lift himself up by doing good *Karmas*. It is he who has to decide what he will be in his next birth. No amount of rituals can wash his/her our sins. It is only by good actions that redemption is possible.

In *Puran GauHatya* is a heinous sin as in Hindu traditions cows are worshipped because they are believed to be the repositories of all Gods. By killing it, the sinner has to compensate by giving hundred cows. Similarly, according to Hindu Shastras*Hatya*or *Vadha* denotes the most heinous sin. No human being has got right to take away another's life. In scriptures several, prominent types of killing are discussed.

Killing of a *Brahmana* is considered as a sin. In Hindu Shastras *Brahmana* is accorded supreme place over other people because of the kind of life he leads including his character and conduct. There are other types of sins which are discussed such as depriving someone of his/her property and wealth, whether in small quantity or large. This is also considered as one of the grave sins in scriptures.

Similarly, King Dashrath's action of killing a boy although by mistake ultimately recoils, upon him. Dashrath who had gone for hunting on the banks of River *Sarayu*, shot an arrow on Shravan to his death mistaking him to be an animal. The parents of the boy cursed Dasharatha for his unrighteous act. This curse became a reality and he suffered the separation of his son.

The residue of sin called *paap* sometimes envisioned as a sticky, astral substance which can be dissolved through penance or *prayashchita,* austerity and good deeds. The word *prayashchita* means repentance of sin. That is, it clears the impressions made by the act of sin on the mind of the sinner. An action undertaken to correct the error made in the past. There are divergent views on *prayashchita* as a tool to remove the sins committed. It is believed that sins that are committed intentionally, have no route to escape and the individual has to suffer the consequences of ones action. The action that resulted in sin, due to ignorance or negligence or committed unintentionally can be atoned by resorting to various practices prescribed.

It is generally believed that there is no practice of confession in Hindu religious customs. If confession is taken as an act of praying to God for freeing oneself of the mistakes committed in the past, there are a number of prayers suggested for this. The Vedas contain prayers for forgiveness. In the *Dharma* Shastra, various instances of place, time and the manner of confessions are given. However, the major difference between confession in Hinduism and other religions is that confession is not to remove guilt from ones mind but rather to initiate a series of actions that are meant to reduce the consequence of sin.

Repentance or *anutapa* is one of the major steps towards redemption. A sinner should feel the burden of sin. It is not a series of actions, but repentance that makes a sinner fit to initiate *prayaschitta*. There are various ways for *prayaschitta* or acts to remove sins suggested in the Hindu scriptures.

Tapas or austerity is the centre of all expiation in Hindu religion. There are divergent opinions on what constitutes austerity. An article by Raj Anand Sharma on austerity, speaks about sage Gautama that, one who practices celibacy, truthfulness, fasting, sleeping on the ground, reciting the sacred syllables every day without fail and one who takes bath thrice a day embraces austerity. It states that an individual has to observe austerity depending on the number of sins he has committed.

Jaapa is another way of repentance. It is a practice of repeating a sacred syllable. It could be a *mantra* given by ones preceptor or a sacred syllable prescribed for particular expiation. There are verses from various *purans* which says that taking God's name expiates one from heinous crimes.

Charity or *Daan* is yet another popular practice that is being practiced even today as part of one's expiation or simply as part of routine affairs in life. A Hindu is expected to give charity to poor and needy. *Daan* is not a separate form of practice especially when it comes to sin and *prayaschitta* but a series of actions that have to be performed for redemption.

Gayatri Mantra is also alluded to as a means of *prayashchitta* for many sins. The *Gayatri Mantra* is a highly revered mantra from the *Vedas*. Like all Vedic mantras, the *Gayatri mantra* is considered not to have an author. It is believed to have been revealed to Brahmarshi Vishvamitra. It is a verse from a *sukta* of the *Rigveda* (Mandala 3.62.10)[10]. *Gayatri* is the name of the Vedic meter in which the verse is composed. As the verse can be interpreted to invoke Savitr, it is also called the Savitri mantra. Its recitation is traditionally preceded by *om* and the formula *Bhur Bhuva Svaya*, known as the *Mahavyahti* great mystical utterance.

The *Gayatri mantra* is repeated and cited very widely in Vedic literature and praised in several well-known classical Hindu texts such as the *Manusmriti*. There is nothing greater than the *Savitri (Gayatri) Mantra*):
Om bhurbhuvasva
tat saviturvare (i)ya
bhárgodevasyadhimahi
dhíyoyonapracodayat

It is believed by practitioners that reciting the *mantra* bestows wisdom and enlightenment, through the vehicle of the Sun (Savitr), who represents the source and inspiration of the universe.

There is a *pramaana* that because it impacts *rakshana* (safety) from *doshas* and sins thus it is called gayatri, and one who sings will be saved from *dosha, bramhahatyapatak, pashuhinsaupapatakashuddhi*. In *agni purana Mahapatakprayaschittahoma* is being narrated where it mentions one lakh *jaap* for *Bramha hatya* where on doing *jaap* of *gayatri*, one gets *parihaar*.

As one can see that the principles of *punya* and *paap*, though religious in nature have been devised and used in Hinduism to purify and prepare a person for spiritual quest. The balance sheet of *paap* and *punya* is so complicated and vast in Hindu philosophy that it is very difficult to put it in a few pages.

Swami Vivekananda's Elucidation on Sin

In the light of the above discussion on sin and salvation it is good exercise to evaluate the views of Swami Vivekananda interpretation on this topic. Vivekananda seeks to highlight the spectrum of sin with his broad range of modern thoughts which he spoke hundred years ago.

In the present context of sin Vivekananda, points out certain aspects of human behaviour which is observed in society. Swami Vivekananda never believed in the traditional doctrine of sin. He says:

Sins are very low degrees of Self-manifestation; manifest yourself in a higher degree. That is the one thing to remember; all of us can do that. Never say, "No", never say, "I cannot", for you are infinite. Even time and space are as nothing compared with your nature. You can do anything and everything, you are almighty. . . . If individual thinks himself as weak he will never become strong, but if he knows himself to be a lion who rushes out from the world's meshes, as a lion from its cage (Vol. 2:300)[11].

This gives an insight into Swami Vivekananda's mind that an individual can overcome sin or weakness and can come out with triumphant by the force of his thought through his teachings leading a prosperous life.

His lectures and discourses have remarkable clarity of thought, depth of insight, vast comprehensiveness of vision communicated with perfect lucidity of expression. According to him sin is an error which an individual commits due to ignorance; it is this ignorance which is known as Maya which when an individual looses the sight of truth fails to differentiate between right and wrong. Further, Vivekananda speaks of Shri Krishna's word that when an individual posses a low nature such as cruelty and wickedness inherent in it such individuals are enveloped by ignorance. Their ego does not allow any power to guide them. In such a condition an individual commits sin.

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Vivekananda's views of sin are more in relation to community life than to personal life. By sin he means some defects of human nature or society. One of the major sins that he speaks is of illiteracy, which hinders the progress of the country and gives birth to most of the bigger problems, due to lack of knowledge superstition, poverty, fanaticism and others exist resulting in hatred, intolerance and weakening of society.

All knowledge that the world has ever received comes from mind, the infinite library of the universe is in ones mind. Therefore, wrong beliefs lead to superstition and blind belief. Vivekananda always said that blind belief in thirty two million god and goddesses is like being atheist something which leads people astray from having faith in their own goodness.

All ideas relate to blind belief in Gods are treated as superstitions by Vivekananda. The Vedanta teaches men to have faith in themselves first. As certain religions of the world would say that those who do not believe in a personal God are atheists. Vivekananda refutes this. He says, individual must have faith in himself. If we have faith in ourselves then a large portion of evils and superstitions will vanish. It is not out of place to mention here about poverty, which is one of the major sins in the eyes of Swami Vivekananda. As long as the disease known as civilisation exists, a vast majority of masses have lived a cursed life, under the shadow of poverty. In *The Complete Worksof Swami Vivekananda,* he says:

The poverty of the majority of the masses was strongly dwelt upon. India with an area much smaller than the United States, contains twenty three hundred millions (sic) of people, and of these, three hundred millions (sic) earn wages, averaging less than fifty percent per month. In some instances the people in whole districts of the country subsist for months and even years, wholly upon flowers, produce by a certain tree which when boiled are edible… According to Swami Vivekyonda, the need of people of India is not more religion, or a better one, but as he express it "practicality", and it is with the hope of interesting the American people in this great need of the suffering, starving millions that he has come to this country (Vol. 3:465)[12].

Further Swami Vivekananda has primarily laid stress on the development of character and it is obvious that without strong and pure character, no one can do lasting good to the world. Therefore, he speaks that selfishness is the chief sin, which destroys an individual's personality. He who thinks that he will eat first, and will have more money than others and will get heaven before others is the selfish man whereas, "The unselfish man says, 'I will be last, I do not care to go to heaven, I will go to hell if by doing so I can help my brothers'. This unselfishness is the test of religion" (Vol. 3:143)[13].

Society plays a vital role in developing character which is at the same time the product of socio-economic reality. A man of taste is very much appreciated in society. The artistic temperament is regarded as a sure sign of a cultured character. But it is a sad thing that many so called cultured people are folks who have hardly undergone any inward transformation of soul or acquired any enriching grace of personality.

This vibrant personality proclaims child marriage and untouchability as one of the greatest sins. He says, that Untouchability is a blot on Hinduism and is considered as sin. It is because of this that Indians are treated as *Shudras* in all the countries. He points that these are not the fallen ones but one falls if actions are immoral. Charles F. Andrews expresses in his book *Mahatma Gandhi: His Life and Ideas* about Gandhiji's views that:

I do not want to be reborn. But if I have to be reborn, I should be born an untouchable, so that I may share their sorrows, sufferings, and the affronts levelled at them, in order that I may endeavor to free myself and them from that miserable condition (165)[14].

Swami Vivekananda expresses that if untouchability is not removed from society people will be preparing their own graves. Such deep respect for human dignity and understanding about the suffering

humanity are scattered throughout his work which have been of invaluable help to workers in social, political and other fields.

According to him education plays a vital role in making a person happy. Swami Vivekananda often called good education, necessary for building character because it promotes a person's all round growth, physical, intellectual, moral and spiritual. Education is not the amount of information that is put into ones brain and runs riot there, undigested in life but a life-building, man-making and character making force.

An educated person should develop a strong will power, which comes from the power of knowledge and emotions coming together. The concept of true education is yet not clear to Indians. Mere passing the exams and delivering good lectures is not education. Great education makes the common masses struggle for existence and give the strength equip to avoid committing sin. This should be the aim of true education.

II.   Conclusion

Vivekananda's powerful ideas continue to impact humanity and will do so in the future because of the eternal truth contained in them. It is worthwhile to note that different doctrines and creeds which prevail at a time are not isolated phenomena and does not spring forth all of a sudden and from nothing. Vivekananda gave voice to the prevailing evils of society and the evil impact these practices had on the overall health and happiness of the society. The great object of religion, of state and of society is the cultivation of truly civilised people, where mind, heart and soul combine to build happiness.

Therefore, sin or error is because of one's own limitations that make it difficult for an individual to know one's true nature because the soul is immersed in what is alien to it and finds it difficult to get self knowledge. It is the ego in man which hinders him in knowing his self as something other than the true reality of god. It enters in man when he forgets that he is divine being and lives the life of flesh only. It is not anything that is done against the will of god but in the sense it is the betrayal of one's own true nature.

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