



## Privilege: A Curse of Human Civilization, On the Light of Swami Vivekananda.

Dr. Bhaskar Jha,

Asstt. Prof. in Philosophy, Raiganj University. Phone No .9434231601

Received 26 October, 2015; Accepted 16 November, 2015 © The author(s) 2015. Published with open access at [www.questjournals.org](http://www.questjournals.org)

**ABSTRACT:-** Happiness may be of two kinds- finite or empirical happiness and infinite happiness or bliss. Empirical happiness is an imperfect reflection of infinite bliss and it arises from sensible objects. According to the Vedantists, Brahman is the supreme happiness, the infinite bliss. The attainment of Brahman is the highest good. Ontologically finite self is identical with Brahman. So, the summum bonum of life is self-realization. Vivekananda thought that essentially all man are same, all are Brahman. So, no man should enjoy any kind of privilege. But in our day-to-day life, we are habituated to look that most of the people wants to take privilege of some kind or other. We know that in ancient India, Brahmins enjoyed various types of privileges. Now-a-days the political leaders enjoy many privileges. Our Constitution gives various types of privileges to the people belonging to various casts and communities. Here a question may be raised: Whether these are justifiable? In the present paper I shall explain Swami Vivekananda's opinion about privilege. Whether his opinion in this respect is acceptable or not, is also explained here.

**Keywords:-** Brahman, privilege, highest good, self-realization, happiness.

### I.

Swami Vivekananda realized that all the Upanisadas try to prove one thing: What is that knowing which we know everything in the universe? According to the Advaitins, the whole universe is the apparent evolution of God. Apparently God is the material cause of the universe. In the case of illusion of a snake in the piece of a rope, the rope actually does not change into rope, but only appears so.

Vedantins hold that the soul and the universe are one. They admit that there is only one soul which appears as many. Atman or God is the efficient cause as well as the material cause of the universe. All changes are apparent. One thing is different from another by name and form and so, name and form are the causes of differences. A man sees phenomenon, when he is in ignorance. The same divinity is present in the worm as well as in the human being. The basis of morality comes from this thinking: "In injuring another, I am injuring myself; in loving another, I am loving myself." <sup>1</sup> A man can reach the state of perfection when he becomes ready to give up his life for a little insect.

According to Swami Vivekananda, in the spiritual realm India conquers the world and western thinkers are not able to perceive this. Indians are not interested with the material happiness, but they always engaged themselves to find God. Instead of searching God in the outer world, Indians from ancient times, turned their attention into the inner world or Atman. An individual can be sure only about the self. If a man can know self, only then he can truly know the universe. In the Rig Veda, we find a basic question: Who or what existed in the beginning? Vedanta philosophy tries to answer this question by saying that it is Atman or Universal Soul by which all things have been manifested. Thus the Vedantins discovered the basis of ethics. Ethics teaches that we should not injure or kill anybody, we should love our neighbor etc. But the question is: Why? We do not find any satisfactory answer of this question from any other philosophy until we accept the Vedanta view that Atman is absolute, all-pervading and so infinite. "There cannot be two infinities, for they would limit each other and would become finite."

## II.

According to Vedanta, each individual soul is a part of the Universal Soul which is infinite. So in injuring anybody, an individual actually injures himself. Vivekananda said that this is the basic metaphysical truth underlying all ethical codes.

According to Swami Vivekananda, Vedanta philosophy stands at the background of all philosophies in the world. Vedanta philosophy claims that man is divine and everything is the outcome of consciousness of the divine. As everything is the outcome of that divinity, so, essentially there is no difference between man to man. Vedanta says that man should be treated not as what he manifests, but as what he stands for and each human being stands for the divine. Every man is trying to unfold the divinity. Vedanta allows infinite variation of religious thought. It never tries to bring everybody to the same opinion, because the goal is the same. As we are struggling to reach the same goal, so we should not be impatient. When a man finds that divinity is present in every human being, then he may reach the universal brotherhood and that man may be called a true Vedantist. This is the practical result of Vedanta.

All changeable things are bounded by some cause or causes. If we say that God has become this universe, then we should accept that God is changeable. A changeable God can never be a God. This is the difficulty of Pantheism. Vedanta tries to avoid this difficulty. According to Advaita Vedanta, this universe is only an appearance. "God has not changed at all, and has not become the universe at all."

## III.

The variety, which we find in the universe is only apparent, due to space, time and causation; the differentiation is not real. This theory is not idealism as it does not say that the universe does not exist. It says that the universe exists apparently, but not really. To illustrate this point, the Advaitins gave an example. In the darkness, a stump of tree is perceived by a superstitious person as a ghost, a policeman as a robber and a waiting person as his friend. In all the above cases, the stump of the tree remains same, there are only apparent changes. Everything of the universe is partly our creation and partly something outside, everything is a combination of inside and outside which are unknown and unknowable. Vedanta holds that this inside and outside are the same, the Brahman.

Vedanta says that everything in the universe is absolute. All persons are the whole of that absolute. Division, limitation etc. are only apparent. Vedanta preaches that all persons are complete and perfect and are never bound. We are free always and shall remain free forever. Birth, death etc. are only apparent. "This whole world is admitted as an apparent world, bound by time, space, and causation, and it comes to what is called the Vivarta-Vada in Sanskrit, evolution of nature, and manifestation of the Absolute."

## IV.

The absolute is unchangeable. The inside of everything always remains the same, change occurs only in the covering.

Maya makes a screen over the soul. For Maya we cannot know the real nature of human beings. But Vivekananda thought that there is a little hole somewhere, through which we can catch only a glimpse of the soul. When the hole is bigger, we see more and more and when the screen is vanished totally, we may come to know that we are the soul, we are the absolute. Though absolute exists in everyone, yet in some persons it is manifested more than the other. Actually, the whole universe is one. So, it is meaningless to say that one person is superior than the other. The obstacle of soul manifestation is more in animals, is little in ordinary man and in perfect man, it is totally vanished. The sun may be covered by the clouds, but the sun is unaffected by them. As soon as the air drives the clouds away, the sun appears as unaffected. Likely, the soul is changeless, it does never born, nor dies. Birth, death, reincarnation etc. are only appearances. When a person is in dream, he thinks that the objects of dream are true. But as soon as he awake up, he comes to know that the things were false. Similarly, when knowledge arises, then the whole universe will appear as illusion. The whole universe is going towards the infinite. Knowledge helps us to attain that goal. Universal love is possible if we come to know that everything i.e. all men and animals and plants are same, because all are going towards the same goal. Vivekananda said that all knowledge and power comes from within. Nature is like a reflecting glass and knowledge is nothing but reflection of the within in the glass of nature. "Equality is the basic ethical principle, not an assertion of fact."

## V.

Vivekananda was against all kinds of privilege. A man cannot be a true Vedantist if he admits any kind of privilege. Though the same power and potentiality is present in every man, yet in somebody it manifests more than the others. Vedanta philosophy never believes that one man is superior than the other. Vivekananda believed that if we put two men in the same circumstances, the same intelligence will come out. In the case of spirituality, no man can claim privilege because God is in all human souls. "The help comes from yourself ...

there is no help for you outside of yourself; you are the creator of the universe ... ever tell yourself, ' I am He'. These are the words that will burn up the dross that is in the mind, words that will bring out the tremendous energy which is within you already, the infinite power which is sleeping in your heart."

## VI.

The idea of special messenger of God is meaningless. Everything is manifestation of God. Vivekananda said that freedom of religious thought which we find in India, is one of the great effects of Vedanta. A true Vedantist does not believe in religious persecution, he accepts freedom in all religions. A true sage looks everything with the same eye. If we purify ourselves, the world is bound to be purified.

Vivekananda thought that this is the practical side of Vedanta-morality which is necessary for all times. Excess of knowledge and power, without holiness, makes human beings devils. We should change the unstable condition of mind. True religion will come if we give up the idea of privilege. We should work for that knowledge which will bring the feeling of someone towards all mankind. Vivekananda thought that pride of spirituality is the most awful bondage that ever existed and we should conquer this also. Actually we know nothing unless we do not know that God is in all.

According to Vivekananda, from the beginning of society we find that there are two forces which are working throughout the nature. One is constantly differentiating and the other is constantly unifying. In every human being we find the action of these two forces. It seems that the whole universe is the battle-field of these two forces. The differentiating force works for caste, for class and for privileges and the unifying force works for destroying them. It may be said that we should stop thinking of absolute sameness, because it will lead mental degeneration. To support the privileges in their favour the Brahmins of ancient India urged this view. They declared that the destruction of caste system would lead to the destruction of Indian society.

The basis of ethics is love and its aim is unity and sameness. Vedanta philosophy found this unity and wanted to take everything upon this idea of unity. In the external world we find variation, but we have to perceive unity among these variations. Vivekananda said, "The whole universe is a play of unity in variety, and of variety in unity. The whole universe is a play of the finite in the Infinite. We cannot take one without granting the other."

## VII.

It may be said that so long as life lasts, it is impossible to reach a state where all variations died down. But Vivekananda claimed that God already exists, He is not to be made. Likely, unity has not to be made, it already exists. We have to recognize that unity. Again it may be said that if the aim of ethics is absolute sameness, it appears to be impossible. There are so many differences among men, one may have more power and capacities than the other. We cannot change this. But at the same time, Vivekananda said that the teachers of morality teaches us that an ideal man does not injure Self by the Self, because he is able to perceive that the same God is equally present among all. The people whose minds are fixed on the sameness may conquer the relative existence in this life. So, Vivekananda said that we should reject all types of privilege, it is harmful for human civilization. Vivekananda said, "Teach men of strength that is already within them. Manifest yourselves in a high degree. Faith in ourselves is of the greatest help to us as it is the faith of God within."

## VIII.

In conclusion, we can say that Vivekananda's opinion about privilege is relevant even today. As a true Vedantist, Vivekananda thought that no man should accept any type of privilege. We should fight to destroy all privilege. It is a natural fact that physically and intellectually some people are stronger than the other, but on this basis they should not deprive the others. Privilege is the enjoyment of advantage over another and the aim of morality is the destruction of privilege. If we can do so, then we may attain the sameness without destroying variety. The essence of life is variety. Variety will always remain among the people of the world. But, on the basis of this variety no man should enjoy more privilege than the others. The aim of ethics is not destruction of variation and establishment of sameness in the external world. Its aim is to recognize unity inspite of all variations and to recognize the Brahman within. Privilege does not help us to concentrate our mind on Brahman, but sravana ( hearing the scriptures), manana ( thinking about the words of scriptures) and nididhyasana (concentration) are necessary to attain Brahman. "Hearing the texts, reflection upon them, and concentration of the mind on the Atman or Brahman are the common duties of persons in all the stages of life."

By true knowledge we can destroy the false identification of the self with the not-self. Only by true knowledge we can overcome ignorance and attain Brahman which is our highest goal. People who are habituated to enjoy privilege are not able to realize Brahman, because it destroys the power of their mind. They think that they are not able to do any work without taking privilege. Vedanta philosophy teaches us that all men

are equal, all are Brahman. Vivekananda thought that infinite power is within us. We have to know this. Not by taking the help of privilege, but by using the power of our mind, we can attain the true knowledge of Brahman. That means, privilege does not help us to attain our highest goal, it only helps to fulfill some practical needs. So, by following Vivekananda, it can be said that if we want to attain liberation, then we must reject to enjoy all types of privilege.

#### **REFERENCES**

- [1]. The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda, Vol-1, Published by Swami Budhananda, President, Advaita Asrama, Mayavati, Almora, Himalayas, Page-364.
- [2]. Ibid, page 385.
- [3]. Ibid, page 418.
- [4]. Ibid, page 420.
- [5]. Peter singer, Practical Ethics, Published by Cambridge University Press, 1993, Page – 21.
- [6]. The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda, Volume- page 26.
- [7]. The Complete works of Swami Vivekananda, Vol-1, Published by Swami Budhananda, President, Advaita Asrama, Mayavati, Almora, Himalayas, Page -433.
- [8]. Swami Vivekananda's Discoveries About India, Swami Bhajanananda, Prabhuddha Bharata, Page 1.
- [9]. Jadunath Sinha: A Manual of Ethics, Published by New Central Book Agency, Calcutta- 700009, 1984, Page 385.