SOCIAL PHILOSOPHY OF VIVEKANANDA AND INDIAN NATIONALISM

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Gratefully and Gracefully
To
Professor Rajendra Prasad
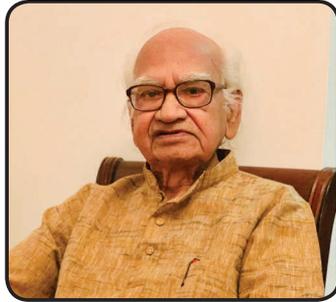
Who initiated me to academic writing
And taught me where to Look and how to See

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Preface

The present work embodies a positivistic study of Indian nationalism approached through the social, cultural and philosophical ideas of Swami Vivekananda accomplished during my tenure as UGC Emeritus fellow (2017-2019) for two years by the University Grants Commission. I have made a profitable use of this leisurely employment which the UGC granted me after my retirement from Panjab University, Chandigarh. I may also mention here that during this time, I was appointed as a visiting professor, Centre for Philosophy, JNU which made this work more comprehensible because of the academic environment and profitable discussions with my colleagues over there. I am especially thankful to Prof. Bindu Puri who was instrumental for my appointment in JNU as a visiting professor.

The Emeritus project that I had submitted to the UGC was named **'**Human Development and Pluralistic Nationhood: Approached through Swami Vivekananda'. During the course of my reading and reflection, I have made a slight change in the title which is now read as 'Social Philosophy of Vivekananda and Indian Nationalism'. The present study deals with topics like Concept of Nation and Nationalism, Vivekananda and Social Philosophy of India, Indian Nationalism and Social Ideas of Vivekananda, Indian Nationalism and Religious Pluralism: Re-Locating Swami Vivekananda and Swami Vivekananda and India's Future Destiny in somewhat unconventional way.

The first chapter of the book is a re-examination of the concept of nationalism in India whose genesis has deeper philosophical connotation keeping in view of the hypothesis of this concept. The first chapter of the book is named as concept of nation and nationalism where I tried to articulate my view that Indian concept of nationalism cannot be explained without taking recourse to Indian cultural milieu and spiritual consciousness because Indian concept of nationalism is rooted and conditioned by her spiritual ethos. The Vedic and Upanishadic seers discovered the

essential nature of the terrestrial existence as Sat, Cit and Ananda (The Supreme Reality as self-existent Being, Consciousness and Bliss) which is veiled in the phenomenal oppositions of matter, life and mind. The mind of India traces its spirituality, culture, and ways of life upon a philosophy of intuitive thought which is the philosophy of the Upanishads. In the Upanishads, mind evinced an increasing tendency toward an independent and exclusive self-development and absorbed whatever intuition had to offer for the illumination and affirmation of life. People lived a rich and robust life in the Upanishadic period and established harmony between them and the intense seeking after truth that was so much in evidence among the kings and nobles no less than among the sages and saints of the time. In fact, the watchword of the concept of progress in India was rooted in spirituality and harmony. We have such marvelous examples like the Rajarsis or the sage-kings like Janaka ruling over a vast empire and at the same time living the unfettered, luminous life of the Spirit; and of Brahmarsis or kings of sages like Yajnavalkya-perhaps the greatest figure in the Upanishads- who is said to be the father of idealistic school to whom truth was greater than anything else and yet who accepted with both hands worldly possessions along with spiritual riches. Among other noted monarchs of this age were Pravahana Jaivali, Ajatasathru and Asvapati Kaikeya who managed the affairs of their States, led armies into the battlefield and were at the same time widely known as great teachers of Brahma Vidya.

The book is visualized as a study on the importance of Swami Vivekananda in the growth of nationalism in India. Hence, the second chapter of the book is an in-depth study of the social philosophy of Vivekananda which was instrumental to change the superstitious and primarily ecclesiastical society that was engineered and conditioned by castes practices and untouchability. There was lack of social freedom coupled with illiteracy and poverty. He considered that for the progress of any society, dynamism is more important than stability and order. Thus, Vivekananda had warned that if Indian society remains stagnant with antiquated beliefs, prejudices and caste rigidities causing a situation of confusion and primitivism, it might hamper its social

progress. The uniqueness of Vivekananda was his endeavour to translate every ounce of Vedanta into a social living and was never a cold theoretician or an abstract metaphysician. Being aware of the inescapable entanglement of man to his socio-cultural and economic-political surroundings, Vivekananda tried to link both spiritual enlightenment and social activity. He was able to combine high idealism with intense practicality and thereby able to reconcile ancient tradition with modern innovation providing a link between spirituality and science, absolutism and pantheism in order to arrive at a unity and oneness of reality which is the essence of neo-*Vedanta*. Thus, his philosophy was centered on the deep aspects that encompassed spiritualism, universal values, religion, character building and education, spirit of service, social issues and women empowerment.

The third chapter is intended to an appraisal of the impact and reflections of the life and teachings of Swami Vivekananda on the cultural, social, economic and political milieu of India which is titled as 'Privileging Social Equality and Critical Appropriation of Tradition'. It is known to all of us that Vivekananda has attempted to reorient the traditional Indian spiritualism to meet the demands of modern society. Instead of preaching 'other-worldliness', this new spiritualism affirms life and discourages indifference to socio-political activities. Vivekananda has extended spiritual plane to the daily practical life. He has drawn practical lessons in relation to the matters concerning religion by liberating religion from the label of mere theory or an intellectual consent. He advocated the reconciliation of material and spiritual development not only for the future of Indian but also for an ideal society anywhere in the world. While analyzing different kinds of privileges, he realized that the worst one and most tyrannical is the privilege of spirituality because of their claim to know more of spirituality and of God. He ridiculed those people who considered themselves the messengers of God, the forerunners of spirituality and demanded worship and superior privileges in society.

The fourth chapter is purported to examine Indian nationalism and religious pluralism and the role of Swami Vivekananda. The inherently pluralistic ethos of Hinduism is reflected not only in the

wide range of beliefs and ideas but also in stratification, customs, traditions and behaviour patterns. It was during the colonial period that India had produced its conception of Nationalism mostly inspired by the western forms of Nationalism. However, the type of nationalism that got exhibited to the colonized countries during the colonial period was imperial, expansionist and oppressive. The ideology of colonialism preached civilizational difference and hierarchy between the colonizer and the colonized. Even during the early phases of anti colonial movement in India, the traditional society was informing its immanent complexities asking for response from the leaders of Nationalist thought and movement. The minority religions of India wanted that the emerging Indian nationalism encompasses the difference of their identities. In the realm of languages, there were clear articulations among the developed regions such as Bengal, Maharashtra, Punjab, Tamil Nadu etc that their languages and cultures must be adequately represented in the national program. The Dravidian and Akali movements are one of the earliest articulations of differences within the Indian sub continental Nationalist politics. Similarly there were varieties of caste articulations that the subaltern masses demanded to find themselves in the nationalist movement. No lesser the gender issues, peasant question, workers' representation etc came up for getting depicted in the nationalist program.

The final chapter is an attempt to critically evaluate the future destiny of India. A galaxy of scholars has made invaluable contribution to the reconstruction of India's past and their thought and philosophy have influenced other philosophies such as Greek. There have been attempts too on the part of Indians to interpret our culture and thought to the world and thereby showing the Indian soul to the world. Among the inspired sons who voiced the message of Mother India, Swami Vivekananda stands out as a majestic tower of light. But, contemporary India faces new and grave difficulties not merely of an economic, political and national nature, but of a new culture where the democratic culture of this country and the individuality of persons are questioned and even thwarted. People's loss of self-confidence, decline of mutual trust, sense of guilt and helplessness, decay of earlier orientations

and lack of new ones, increasing rate of sex-ratio, collapse of metaphysical rationality with the replacement of instrumental rationality, gaining of irrationalism over the traditional value systems, journalistic terror unleashed by some of the Television anchors, supreme silence of the highest court in India in various human rights issues, and Hindutva as a new culture and sensibility of the people are different phases of a new crisis. A glance at the newspapers in this country on any given day is likely to reveal a grab bag of stories involving the struggles of various religious groups to redefine the shape of the societies in which they wish to live. What is at stake here is the boundaries between religious groups, which we carve purely in terms of our imposed identities. Let us no more claim that political communities formed in the name of religious faiths are simply grown on trees. They are, rather, the products of a sort of a religious engineering in which collectivities are molded through the manipulation of religious identities and their Gods. What we should bear in our minds is the bare truth that India's life is governed by her sovereign sense of the Infinite and inclusiveness which nourished her national life and India has been a spiritual strength for her people, implanting the seeds that have continuously sprouted and flowered in her art, literature, religion, philosophy, science and politics. Regrettably, what we had been glorifying as the central value of this culture and civilization is disorientated today due to the brutal exhibition of barbarous instincts which were exhibited through the rivalry between religious groups. What is being experienced is the loss of inherited values and at the same time, the Indian intellectuals' inability in reinventing new values. By virtue of its characteristic pluralism and its continuously evolving synthesis, India represents a nation which is continuously unfolding its civilizational potentialities. In making of such an Indian ethos, the profound foundational ideal which has been the basis of Indian culture and civilization is the concept of *Dharma.*

I acknowledge the help rendered by my wife, Mrs. Lucy Sebastian, daughters Dr. Ivy Sebastian Philips, Ashley Sebastian, my son-in-law Dr. Atul Philips and granddaughter Aiyana Sebastian Philips. I am thankful to my colleagues in

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Concept of State, Nation and Nationalism

It is universally acknowledged that every culture, tradition and civilization has its own unique features through which every civilization becomes distinctive in character and in its moral fiber. From this perspective, when we look and Indian culture and evaluate its exclusivity, it can be assertively stated that Indian civilization and culture is distinguished in respect of its continuity and heterogeneous ethos and also because of its accommodating character Democracy and nationalism are known to be the two powerful movements in the history of world civilization. The concept of nationalism goes hand in hand with certain implicit notions like the Hebrew sense of distinctiveness, Aristotelian and Herodotus' elucidations on the nature of people, the Greek understanding of the Polis and Hellas, and the ancient Roman idea of "Pro Patria Mori', means to die for the country is considered as the highest good. We may also take cognizance of the inspiration that was provided by the University students during the medieval and renaissance times which was organized in the name of nation according to language and region. It is also a fact of history that Elizabethan poetry and Shakespearean players and some of the legal writing and dramas have shown evidence of certain distinctiveness of English and its people and also its sense of nationalism. We cannot just deny that they are merely sporadic incidents of proto-nationalism nor are they the pride of a section

of people from France or the Elizabethan England who had been seeking to change the idea of state into nation. The fact is that the concepts like nation, nationalism, nation state and the like are predominantly new concepts that derived from the aftermath of renaissance and the movements that were linked with renaissance.

A historical search of the concept of nationalism is linked with such concepts like state, nation and nation state. In this context, it is pertinent to explore and inquire whether Indians had a concept like nationalism prior to 20th century. If so, what was it like? Is it the same way as European nationalism? Can we or can we not reasonably believe that our ideas on nationalism are a byproduct of Indian sentiments against British rule? Before the independence movement, can we assertively claim that we had a concept like nationalism? Therefore, our inquiry into the question of 'who are we' coupled with the concepts such as nation, state and nation state ostensibly point to the question whether we had a concept like nationalism prior to the British rule. With these preliminary remarks, let us systematically search the concept of state in India.

Concept of State: Indian Views

It is recognized universally that the characteristic political institution of the indo-Aryans was kingship.[1] The king ruled over either one or several *Rashtras*. As suggested by Viswanath Prasad Varma, the *Vedic Rashtra* was not an exactly defined political term and to translate it by the word state would imply an amount of legal precision which did not obtain in those days. Of course, if we use the term state as anthropologists use it in the sense of cognizable political unit with an acknowledged superior, we can do that. [2] It is generally considered that there are three terms-the families, the tribe and the clan-which indicates the population structure of

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[1] The ancient Sanskrit word for the king is Raja, In the Nirukta, it is derived from the root Raj to be luminous. In the case of Mahabharata, the root of word Raja is from Ranj-to please and hence it means one who makes the people delighted and satisfied.

[2] Viswanath Prasad Varma, Studies in Hindu Political Thought and its metaphysical foundations, Motilal Banarsidass, second edition, 1959, p. 8.

Rashtra and the territorial structure of the *Rashtra* was made of *Gramas*-villages. Thus, it is argued that kingship arose in *Vedic* times as a part of the process of integration of the families, tribes, clans and villages into *Rashtra*-territorial unit or state. In fact, we should not tempt to believe that the political unit as understood in the political philosophy of our times like polis, res publica or civitas is equivalent to the concept of *Rashtra* as conceived by the Vedic people.

In the *Aitareya Brahmana, Rashtram* is identified with dominion or rule-*kshatra*.[3] In the *Taittiriya Samhita*, people are said to be *Rashtra*.[4] Concept of *Rashtra* does not indicate the comprehensiveness and legalism associated with the concept of state. It appears that according to *Kautilya, Rashtra* meant no more than the countryside or the people of the countryside. According to *Sukra, Rashtra* is one of the seven elements of kingdom.[5] Although in Hindi language *Rashtra* means nation-state yet we cannot positively ascribe the same meaning to this concept as understood presently. Perhaps, Hegel was constrained to argue that in pre-modern India, there cannot be any state because of the absence of freedom both as abstract will and as subjective freedom. Therefore, 'Hindu political existence presents us with a people but no state'.[6] The practical point is that *Brahminical* India in its olden days lacked the concept of a state or nation-state as understood in the present times. Thus, Cox says that Hindu society has been a large aggregation of practically autonomous small communities held together by mutual dependence and hence he concludes that *Brahmanic* India may be called a society without an organized state.[7]

In the Vedic age, power of the king was absolutely limited by the authority and power of two institutions, the *Samiti* and the *Sabha*. According to Ludwig, the *Sabha* was an assembly of

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[3] Aitareya Brahmana, vii, 22. 31.
[4] Taittiriya Samhita, I, 6, 10. 3.
[5] Sukranitisara, (Ed) Gustav Oppert, Madras, 1882.
[6] Hegel, GWF, The philosophy of History, New York, 1944, p.161.
[7] Oliver c. Cox, caste, Class and Race, (New York, 1948), p.70.

Brahmins and the rich people while the *Samiti* included the entire people. Dayananda regarded the *Samiti* and *Sabha* as two different institutions. Besides the *Sabha* and the *Samiti,* there are references to *Vidatha* which signifies (1) an assembly for secular ends, (2) an assembly for religious ends and (3) an assembly for war. [8]

Theories of Origin of State in Ancient India

An in-depth understanding of the theories on the origin and nature of State in India is classified under three theories which are the following: Social contract theory, Divine origin theory and Organic theory.

What is the meaning of a state in ancient India? According to the ancient Indian thinkers, the State stands for ensuring peace, order and happiness. It was said to be a social organization with political power. With regard to the origin of the state is concerned, there are diverse opinions among the ancient thinkers. Thus, certain thinkers hold the view that state is the outcome of a contract between ruler and the ruled. Secondly, we see a theory called Saptanga theory that deals mainly with the forms and functions of the state. According to this theory, the primary function of the state is promotion of Dharma. Thirdly, monarchy was considered to be the ideal form of government by ancient thinkers.

The initial idea on the notion of state and kingship is seen in the Aitareya Brahmana. The work is a description of a legend that explains the war between gods and the demon and the defeat of the former. This defeat made the gods to unite and appoint Soma as their king. The king in turn is expected to save the country from all kinds of military attacks and also serve the human needs. Let us briefly describe the three theories of sate.

(a) Social Contract Theory

The social contract theory undergirds the idea that state is the result of a contract between the ruler and the ruled or their representatives. The king was expected to save the country and his subjects from all kinds of external aggression and promote order

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[8] R. V. viii, 38.6 & R. V. ii, 24. 16

and safety measures for the people. Nevertheless, we do not find such a theory or presumption in the earliest Vedic texts. Indeed, it is mentioned that king is elected to wage a war successfully against the demons.

(b) Divine Origin Theory

According to the divine origin theory, king is subordinated to law which is made by the society. This theory gives greater importance to the community than to the king. The king, according to this theory, is a father figure to his subjects and therefore needs to treat them as a loving father. At the same time, there are scriptures like Manusamhita which advocates that the origin of the state is from divine. Thus, Manusamhita states that ' The Lord created the king for the protection of His whole creation…even an infant king must not be despised from an idea that he is only a mortal, because he is a great deity in human form'. Such a view of divine origin of the king is found in Ramayana also. It is stated in Ramayana that the humankind approached Brahma to provide them a king and a human form was emerged and was made the King b Brahma. It is explained in Mahabharata that the king is superior to the ordinary persons and is endowed with noble qualities that is descended directly from heaven. Such a view is also found in the Puranas which describe the divine origin of the king and state. Agni Purana goes to such an extent by depicting king as the embodiment of Lord Vishnu.

(c) Organic Theory

According o the organic theory, state is like an organism. This theory states that each part of the body is responsible for the healthy functioning of the whole organism and its proficient functioning. The organic theory states that there are seven parts in the state which is considered as the whole body and its parts are king or the sovereign, the minister, the territory, the population, city or the capital, the treasury, the army, the friends and the allies. Among these seven parts, it is the king who is most important. We read in the Matsya Purana that the king is the root and the subjects are the trees. Sukra Neetisara compares the state with the human

body. Thus, Sukracharya goes on to illustrate the king as the head of the body, the ministers are the eyes, the treasury is the mouth, army is the heart, the fort is the hands, and the territory is the feet.

State to Nation State: Western Grounds

It is generally acknowledged that the concept of nation- state is a product of modernity. It is also claimed that the idea of nation- state derives from the modern idea of people's sovereignty as being the highest sovereignty. When people can define as to how to live, in what state and in what rule, they could transform their ethnic group into a nation. Concept of nation implies a two-fold meanings: one owes its origin from German romanticism and is articulated in terms of yearning for a tribal unity based on certain ascriptive values which are ascriptive in nature and based on historical legends, as well as on mythology,[9] and the other has its roots firmly based on the French Revolution and is defined in culturological terms. This is to suggest that a nation-state is a community which has its own political and cultural identity. It also implies that the nation (as an ethnic group) is not necessarily a constitutive feature of the state. Such an understanding of the concept of nation obviates the necessity to argue that one can think about nation either as based on ethnic characteristics or civic particularities. Earlier, nation was understood as the inhabitants of a kingdom or a province. We may also take cognizance of the fact that the concepts such as nation, and state were not understood the way we understand these notions currently. The former understanding of nation-state was based on the unity of peoples and thereby checks pluralism of cultural expressions to national symbols. According to the latter, state and society cannot be distinguished merely by striving to construe a monolithic community.

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[9] I. S. Langer, Philosophy in a New Key, Beograd, Prosveta, 1968, as quoted by Zagorka Golubovic, in the article 'National conflicts and the problem of democracy in post-communist societies', in the book "National, Cultural and Ethnic Identities", RVP, Edited by G. F. McLean Jaroslav Hroch and David Hollan, Washington D. C. 1998. S

In the west, 18th century marked the initial starting point of the concept of modern nation state which is regarded to be superior to the emperor and also thought to be the guarantor of rights. The central feature of the history of Europe from 1815 to 1900 is based on the concept of the materialization of a liberal nation-state. Political liberals campaigned not only for freedom of the press but also equally excitable about legal equality and religious toleration as the part of constitution. They advocated for an elected Government with limited powers and franchise granted to adult males on the basis of property and wealth. Economic liberals, on the one hand, desired for open market systems whereas the nationalists, on the other hand, wanted language, customs and culture to replace monarchy as the source of political unity. One can conclusively assert that during the last three decades of the 19th century, the model of nation - state fully gained its general modern meaning and thus spearheaded the setting for political activity in Western Europe

The French Revolution, while accelerating the development of the secular nation - state and giving it a systematic shape, declared the "Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen" (1789) that all men are 'born remain free and equal in rights' and that the purpose of Government is to protect these natural and inalienable rights of 'liberty, property, security, and resistance to opposition. [10] The new nation state subordinated religion to the state. The French National Constituent Assembly confiscated Catholic Church lands to meet a financial crisis and unsuccessfully attempted to make the Church part of the secular state.

The foregoing explanation amply clarifies that nation- states are a product of a specific historical reason that got emanated from Western Europe in 16th and 17th centuries. Until then, the primary loyalty of states was not to a nation but to a particular ruler or dynasty, or sometimes to an oligarchy, army, Church, or tribal chieftain. Indeed, these forms of government were legitimate and

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[10] "The French Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen", in Kevin Reilly, Ed; Readings in World Civilizations (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992), Volume 2, p. 109.

stable, but their stability was impermanent. We may also take into consideration of the fact that the Holy Roman Empire was too fragile to prevent the formation of city states in Northern Europe. Further, it should also be noted that Italy became very prosperous through long-distance trade. These wealth and trade patterns were eventually shared with the West European states and began development of the modern economy.

National Sense and the Concept of Legitimacy

The foregoing considerations allow us to plead that the history of each nation state becomes sufficiently strong when it is competent enough to demand the transfer of legitimacy from the external authority to the nation by bringing down of the pre-national establishment of institutions to make the ruler accountable. Many times, such transference of power is gone along with political violence which may lead to political instability. One of the significant aspects that are central to the idea of nation-state is the transfer of legitimacy from a ruler who is not accountable to those leaders/institutions which are accountable to the nation. This arose as the development of wealth from improved agriculture, trade, and industry created a civil society. The civil society sought a communal identity, through language, religion, common social organizations, and shared experiences and interests and thus became a nation. Following the suggestions of Anthony C. Pick,[11] we can identify three phases in the development of each nation state. Phase I was the development of a nationality within a clearly defined pre-national state. Phase II was the transfer of legitimacy from the ruler to the nation, by some form of rebellion against the ruler or assertion of nationality. Phase III was the expression of that legitimacy by a legal process called a Constitution, under which the government can be appointed and removed, its powers can be debated and approved, and both the government and private litigation are subject to law. Most present states have made the transition to Phase II and of these an increasing number; perhaps

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[11]Anthony. C. Pick, The Nation State: An Essay, March 2011, from the internet sources.

a majority has made the further transition to Phase III. The concepts of sovereignty and legitimacy are necessary to a nation state because, by its nature, the primary loyalty of a population is to its nation. Since there is only one state for each nation, one nation cannot be politically subject to another. We therefore have the legal concept of sovereignty, whereby a nation state is not under the legal authority of any other body. Since loyalty is to the nation as a cultural abstraction, the Government must be accepted by the population as the proper source of the nation's authority. We therefore have the political concept of legitimacy, which such a properly constituted Government possesses. Legitimacy is realized through legal processes generally termed a Constitution. The minimum requirements of a Constitution are that it indicates how a Government is nominated and dismissed and what powers it possesses. If as is usual the Government comprises many bodies such as an executive, legislature, and judiciary, and central and provincial Governments, the Constitution delimits their respective competences. In addition to the identity of the governmental bodies, each of their respective powers and competences must also be legitimate.

Nationalism: Initial Indian Response

It has been shown earlier that there were prominent thinkers, philosophers and social activists from different countries such as Germany, France, England and Russia who played significant roles in providing their important contributions to the concept of nationalism. In fact, the concept of nationalism is a product of modernity. Though the idea of nationhood is differently conceived and manifested in countries like Russia, Germany and England, we may acknowledge that this concept has tremendous impact on the lives and social patterning of many western countries. As an ideology, the concept of nationalism had different colours and varied manifestations.

When we think about the concept of nationalism with regard to India and its soil, it is believed prominently that such a concept had its origin in Indian soil only after the independence movement.