

A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF VEDĀNTIC SOCIALISM OF VIVEKANANDA WITH CLASSICAL SOCIALISM OF KARL MARX: FROM PHILOSOPHICAL PERSPECTIVE

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[Socialism is a political doctrinal substructure that supports the superstructure of democracy of many democratic nation of present world including India. It may be defined as a governance system that calls for public rather than private ownership or control of property or natural resources. It is a parallel political, economic and social system. In west it reached intellectual maturity and influenced in practical politics through the writings of Marx and Engels 1817 onwards. In India, socialism as a political movement founded early in the 20th Century as a part of Indian Independence movement against the British Rule. E.M.S. Namboodiripad, Vinoba Bhave, Jayprakash Narayan, Lal Bahadur Shastri, Jawaharlal Nehru, B.R. Ambedkar were reknown Indian socialist. Before these great thinkers Vivekananda advocated a unique kind of socialism which is known as Vedāntic socialism. Both Marx and Vivekananda acclaimed socialism to fight against injustice, labour exploitation and poverty. The objective of this paper is to compare Vedāntic socialism of Vivekananda with dassical socialism of Karl Marx from philosophical perspective.

Key words : Socialism, Vedāntic Socialism, Classical Socialism, Matter and Consciousness.]

Vivekananda (1863-1902) formerly known as Narendranath Dutta, is one among those great men who made better plane for salvation of entire mankind. Besides being a world teacher of undisputed imminence, he was a great patriot and nation-builder. His life coincided with the most dynamic period of modern transition in India. Transition resulted from the contact of age old Indian culture and tradition with the youthful culture of modern west. Vivekananda was a non-academic philosopher of Vedāntic

heritage. He was neo-Vedāntin and essence of his philosophy based on Vedas and Upanisad. Though Śankara's and Rāmānuja's Vedānta are popular among Indian but Vedānta philosophy is enriched with five branches- (1) Śankara's Vedānta, (2) Rāmānuja's Vedānta, (3) Ballava's Vedānta, (4) Madhavacharya's Vedānta, (5) Nimbārka's Vedānta. All these branches of Vedānta are founded on three common postulates (i) man's real nature is divine (ii) aim of life is to realize inherent divinity of men (iii) all religions are in agreement regarding this.

Vivekananda went to western world with his message of Vedānta, that Vedānta is not only intellectual exercise or philosophical thought. It can be guiding principle of our life and it can reorder, regenerate our life and society. He became neo-vedāntin or practical vedāntin. One such guiding principle of life and society is his view of vedāntic socialism based on age old vedānta philosophy.

Karl Marx (1818-1883) was a famous German economist, political and social philosopher of the nineteenth century. His economic and political philosophy is known as Marxism but it is interesting to note that this term 'Marxism' was unknown in his own life time. Perhaps Marx was not interested to offer a comprehensive world view. G.V. Plekhanov (1856-1918), a Russian Marxist towards the end of the nineteenth century advocated Marxism as a whole world view.

On classical Marxism: The original tenets of Marxism as a scientific system of thought are identified as classical Marxism. Apart from Marx and Engels themselves, V.I. Lenin, Rosa Luxemburg, Mao Zedong were chief exponents of classical Marxism. Marxism, in its real sense, first appeared in the middle of the nineteenth century in response to the oppressive condition created by the capitalist system. Classical form of liberalism paved the way to capitalism in a state of bogus human freedom.

Major principle of classical Marxism may be regarded as (1) Dialectic Materialism, (2) Historical Materialism, (3) Theory of Revolution, (4) Doctrine of class conflict, (5) Concept of surplus value. Dialectic materialism refers the philosophical basis of Marx's view of social change. Hegel was spiritualistic or idealistic in his

approach. Marx rejected Hegel's idealistic view that 'idea' or 'consciousness' is the essence of universe and postulates that 'Matter' is the essence of the universe. Matter is the force behind all manifestation of social changes. Every stage of social development is essentially related to material condition. Marx combined Hegel's dialectic method with his philosophy of materialism. According to Hegel's frame work of mechanism of social change rest on 'thesis', 'anti-thesis' and synthesis and idea or consciousness as the real force behind social evolution. Marx refused to recognize consciousness or idea as the real force behind social evolution. Instead Marx believed matter is the sole reality. All human institution or social institutions are shaped by the material conditions of life. All are determined by mode of economic production in society. Thus Marx sought to replace Hegel's dialectic idealism by his own dialectic materialism. Dialectic materialism represents the philosophical basis of Marxism and historical materialism represents its empirical basis. According to historical materialism all types of social relations (social, political, intellectual, ethical) prevailing at any stage of historical development are determined by economic condition. Historical materialism is a social and historical investigation which leads to the conclusion that the process of material production hold the key to man's social life, changes in this process are responsible for all historical development. Even history is story of conflict between antagonistic classes and forces where matter exists on matrix and basis.

On Socialism : In the history of political thought, element of socialism is found in Plato's 'Republic' and Thomas More's 'Utopia'. These theories are based on an ideal that everyone will live together with best possible peace, prosperity and justice in one supportive human community. Later on Plato's view was vehemently criticized by Aristotle. Socialism did not quickly become powerful force in practical politics and it was creed of a minority until 1817. It was only with Marx and Engels that socialism reached intellectual maturity and practically influenced in politics. Marx's work 'communist manifesto' gave Marx his position in the socialist movement. Socialism literally sprang from observing the success of capitalism while believing that condition

for worker could be improved if the control production were moved from capitalist to state.

In 19th century it was a protest and reaction against injustice, labour exploitation, poverty, unemployment in Europe. So, socialism is a social and economic doctrine that calls for public rather than private ownership or control of property or natural resources. Everything that people produce is some sense a social product and everyone who contribute to the production of good is entitled to share in it. Society as a whole therefore own or at least control production for the benefit of all its members. This conviction puts socialism opposite to capitalism which is based on private ownership.

Marx's socialism is also known as scientific socialism because through dialectic materialism and historical materialism both Marx and Engels tried to set fourth set of political and economic principle in order to lay scientific foundation of socialism. Marx declared his socialism as scientific while the other types of socialism are just a pretension of bourgeois utopia.

Turning to the socio-economic condition of India during the last part of 19th century Vivekananda opined that by virtue of existing political and economic system of that time the poor were becoming much poor and the richer rich. According Vivekananda socialism is the only political, social and economic alternative to mould the destiny of down trodden of India. Like Marx, Vivekananda's heart cried for the poor people of India, he stated "The poor, the sinner in India has not friends, no help, they cannot rise, they however they may. They sink lower and lower everyday, they feel the blows showed upon them by cruel society and they do not know from where the blow comes."¹ He observed one class of men went on manufacturing article of utility and comfort within by manual or intellectual labour. A second class proceeded to exchange the thing. It is so happened that some middle men who were very clever undertook to take their things from one place to another and in the place of remuneration they took the major portion of profit as their due. One ploughs the land, the second class protected it from being robbed, the third took it to market and the fourth bought it. At the end of the series, production came to be known as the sole authority of the person who took it to the market

(the merchant). Third and the fourth person profited most without doing labour. The farmers who produced the article often had to go without meal once a day. In similar manner Marx observed that capitalist mode of production involves the exploitation of the working class. Marx formulated concept of 'surplus value' to explain how exploitation of the labour classes takes place. Marx mentioned four elements of production – land, labour, capital and organization. Among them land, capital and organization are sterile because they are capable to reproducing only what is put in them and hence they cannot produce value. Labour is only variable element which can produce value in society. The common substance of all commodities is labour and labour is the only element of production which produces surplus value. Surplus value is production of much more than subsistence wages. Subsistence wages means the wages required to meet the requirements of mere survival of the worker and his family. According to Marx a labour is capable to producing much more than that he requires for survival. If a labour has to work thirty six hours a day for mere survival of him and family and he does only that amount of labour he cannot produce surplus value. In a capitalist system a wage labour is forced to sell all labour power to the capitalist where its market price is determined by law of demand and supply. As a result of increased availability of labour force, the market price of labour declines. The capitalist forces the worker to labour to his maximum capacity but pays only subsistence wages. The value produced by the labour may be divided into two parts – one part of value paid to the worker as wages. The other part comprises the value produces by surplus labour by a worker but the profit of entire surplus value goes to the pocket of capitalist.

Under such scenario Marx came to the conclusion that by overthrowing capitalism and socialization of the means of production under socialist (political and economic) system, can stop exploitation of surplus value. Marx and Engels acclaimed communism to political ideal and regarded it as last stage of socialism.

Vivekananda was deeply moved by the misery of the vast masses of people and he accepted socialism only to the context it would elevate the misery. It was Vivekananda who first thought

about the Indian masses, realized their vital role in the regeneration of India and made other conscious of their duty to elevate misery of down trodden. He coined the word 'Daridra nārāyaṇa', and give a new mantra 'Daridra Deva Bhāba'. Vivekananda's move to socialism has been summed up in his famous sentence "I am a socialist, not because it is perfect system but because I believe that half of a loaf is better than no bread".²

Vivekananda's socialism was verdantic or spiritualistic socialism. By socialism Vivekananda means a pattern of life in which the individual act freely aid spiritually for the good of whole society. His Vedāntic socialism, rest on the climate of change he wanted to bring about in Indian life, conduct and character. He tried for rousing of spirituality among his people through the new and practical interpretation he gave to Vedānta. Inherent spirituality of human being is corner stone of Vivekananda's philosophy. Vivekananda's vedāntic or spiritualistic socialism will be more clear if we quote few lines from V.K.R.V. Rao "The engine of social changes must have it's proper fuel and this according to Vivekananda could only come from spirituality and Vedānta; which proclaimed the innate divinity in men and sameness it give to all men as the basis for social ethics of non exploitation and universal human welfare".³ Here religion has a vital role to play to manifest and exercise latent divinity of human self. Vivekananda's solution was in Vedānta, to all socio economic disorder. Due to lake of spiritual orientation all social system and economic system were in vain. If we all recognize our self with divine and if we all realize all are the just rays of same or reflection of one Brahman, then there will be no one to corrupt and no one will be corrupted.

Vivekananda himself raises the question 'is it practical? can it be practiced in modern society?' Vivekananda's clear cut reply is "Truth does not pay homage to any society ancient or modern. Society has to adjust itself to truth".⁴ According to Vivekananda no amount of force or government or legislative cruelty will change the condition of a race, but spiritual culture and ethical culture can change wrong tendencies prevailing in a society. Spiritual realization and inner transformation is essential.

Study reveals that Marx socialism is essentially materialistic but materialism is quite contradictory to Vivekananda. Out and out

Vivekananda's socialism is spiritualistic and based on the view of one universal consciousness pervading through individual consciousness. His socialism is based on Advaita Vedānta's view of reality which have its expression in 'thou art' that transcendently we are one. At no cost Vivekananda leave spirituality from his thought. He opined that more advanced a society in spirituality, more the society advanced in practical field, more that society or nation is civilized.

Marx was highly critical on religion and believed it as 'opium of the masses to forget sorrows of life' and religion is used to exploit common masses by upper classes with some fancy story which begets illusive dependence and tyranny to a bogus spirituality. For Vivekananda religion (not in deviated sense) was the key to societal regeneration as religion means cultivation of latent human divinity. Vivekananda remarked his dream socialism can be established by spiritualization of human race. Marx argued for proletariat (labour class) revolution as a result of class conflict between proletariat and bourgeoisie (capitalist class) and it will result in final emancipation of human race by paving way to classless society and end of class conflict. Vivekananda also aspired for 'Sudra Raja' but it was not based on class conflict, rather based on the Vedāntic notion 'we all are transcendently one'. Marx observed alienation of working class and Vivekananda stated alienation of entire human race from real nature of human self.

At last we can conclude by following P. Parameswaram "But these socialist polemics apart, which is really significant in the intense concern which Karl Marx and Vivekananda expressed towards the tearing masses."⁵

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