

Indian Economy, Vivekananda and the hope for a resurgent India

I am thankful to Tagore Centre for inviting me to speak on Swami Vivekananda whose 150th birth anniversary is being celebrated this year all over the world.

My main purpose is to speak about the relevance of Vivekanda in the present Indian context. Can his message be helpful in the regeneration of India which is passing through awfully stressful financial condition, corruption and scams of such big proportions of 1 lakh crore rupees have become common now which are sending wrong messages that money is the most important factor in life and that is to be procured by hook or by crook.

Who are players of these scams? Mostly politicians who are in a hurry to fill up their coffers knowing well that next time they would not be elected.

Other players are middle man, criminals and a brand of bureaucrats and all these people have no love for the country or concern for moral values in their lives. Today we are realizing that without the political normative moral order no democracy can survive.

Once Collingwood said that democracy at times can be very tragic and this is exactly what has happened in our country where majority of our members of the parliament have criminal records and they are the people who have a major say in a coalition set up where a person like Manmohan Singh, who created an economic revolution in 1991 is finding himself to be helpless and has no option but to follow the coalition dharma.

India has not been able to attract substantial long-term investments (FDI). The Finance Ministry is now looking at FDI in retail, telecom, airport... everywhere, and expecting the FIIs to bail India out. I am not against FDI.

When you have a trade-GDP (openness of economy- trade is basically export and import and gross domestic product is national income)ratio of 55 per cent maximum with imports of \$500 billion exports of \$309 billion, it means, we have to look at the problem internally and not externally.

In a country like Singapore, the trade-GDP ratio is more than 100 per cent.

Foreign Direct Investors have their own calculations and they don't go anywhere to do charity. Unless they get a rate of return that is more than the rate of investment, they will not come.

More importantly, foreign investors take it for granted that developing countries have low wage rates, they get subsidies and interest rate holidays. Today, there is a competition among developing countries to attract FDI.

So, when deciding a location, they check if a place can complement their core competence, whether there is skilled man power and if the country can help them in their global innovation programs.

We tell the world that we have skilled man power but it is a wrong notion. The higher education enrolment is 15 per cent in India.

Compare it with China which was 24 per cent three years ago, and it has increased by 8 per cent in these last 3 years.

So, if India wants a double digit growth rate like China, we need at least 24 per cent higher education enrolment. But we are nowhere. We have a severe capacity deficit all over.

It has been subject to the vagaries of ‘hot money’ (short-term investments). As is being currently experienced, the scaling back of QE (quantitative easing – money printing by government) by the US government has seen flight of FCY (foreign currency withdrawal by US government) from the Indian market which has put a spiraling downward pressure on the INR (Indian Rupee). With 80 percent of its oil being imported, the depreciating currency is increasing the trade deficit which along with a slowing GDP growth and an increasing inflation rate is detrimental for the Indian economy.

1. Population is an issue
2. Difference between the haves and the have nots – which is not a policy issue but more to do with the educated having lesser children and the uneducated increasing their breed

3. Welfare does not reach the actual people – too many middle-men (food bill)
4. Election means freebies – where is it coming from?
5. Governance – Durga Shakti, Khemka and others
6. Standard of education
7. Where is the conducive environment for investment (current economic situation)

Now in this scenario let me go to the two great figures of the economic world Amartya Sen and Jagdish Bhagvati to find out if they have any panacea or solution for India's economic situation in particular and its overall growth development in general.

Amartya Sen in his latest book “An Uncertain Glory: India and its Contradictions” written along with Jean Dreze argues that Indian rulers have never been properly accountable to the needy majority.

Amartya thinks growth is not good enough without the government's intervention to improve human capabilities to spend on i.e. health and education.

On the contrary Professor Bhagvati by attacking Sen says that Mr Sen has belatedly learned to give lip service to growth, which he has long denounced as a fetish. He did not explicitly advocate any pro-growth policies, such as opening India to trade and to direct foreign investment, in practice before or after the 1991 reforms.

Nor does he recognise that significant redistribution to the poor without growth is not a feasible policy. Food bill, cheap food grain through ration shops etc are to be matched with proper growth. Growth pulls people out of poverty, enabling them to also spend on education and health care; so do the increased revenues from growth. Growth has made redistribution feasible,

These are surefire ways of improving poors well-being — the terminology of 'capabilities' adds nothing to these phenomena!

As economies grow, big public interventions aimed at lifting health, education and other standards result in rapid social gains. India, however, is the exception. Sen and

Dreze say. Worse, its lagging social problems actually serve to drag down economic growth.

I) Indian public health is especially disturbing. It pays for: a pitiful \$39 per person per year for public health, compared with China's \$203 or Brazil's \$483. In India the total amounts to 1.2% of GDP, as against a global average of 6.5%

II) Revenue can be increased, money could be found. The government spends more subsidizing fertilizer for farmers than on all public health care. Fuel subsidies, mostly helping the better off, are equally costly. Ways to raise funds exist. Taxing gold and diamond imports, for example, would bring in nearly \$10 billion in annual revenue, Bhagvati argues.

III) State-provided education, too, is in a shocking state. But sacking a teacher in India is hard. Teachers are well paid and many new schools have been built. Yet quality of instruction, the authors say, remains generally "horrifying". Even the poor prefer private tuition; at least the teachers show up.

The authors argue that the state fails mainly because of deeply entrenched inequality. A ruling elite defined by

caste, but also by gender, education and income, has an utter lack of interest—verging on contempt—in improving matters for the rest.

Sen and Mr Drèze remain optimistic about the long-term outlook. They point to evidence that India's bureaucrats, when properly led and held accountable, can function well. India is only doomed, they argue, if nobody tries to make it work.

Bhagvati speaks of 'growth-enhancing' Track I reforms, and cleaning up the revenues-spending reforms for the poor, which we call Track II reforms, where also Sen has ideas that are harmful to the poor. Bhagvati advocates faster growth through labour and land market reforms to cut poverty yet more deeply and to generate more revenues for social programmes.

Surprisingly both of them Sen and Bhagvati speak of growth and social programmes but hardly speak of education in moral values as essential for a democracy. Except that at one place Bhagvati says that Gujaratis believe in accumulating wealth, but spending it on social good rather than on themselves. This is our Vaishnav and Jain tradition; and it is an ideal model. And Sen in his social choice theory makes intense use of mathematical

logic and also draws on moral philosophy, and so does the study of inequality and deprivation and also the Capability Approach of Sen which is defined by its choice of focus upon the moral significance of individuals' capability of achieving the kind of lives they have reason to value.

But are they lip service to morality?

Sainik Sannyasi – the Soldier Ascetic.

Romain Rolland: Warrior Prophet of India'

Prophet brings the message from God for the benefit of humanity and to bring the humanity into the fold of a particular religion.

But Swamiji followed the path of Vedanta. Vedanta is philosophy not religion but more than philosophy it is an experience though it accepts both as suited to the different levels of spiritual evolution.

Through *chittasuddhi* (purification of mind) and *sadhana* (meditation) one comes to realize that there is no difference between the individual self and the Eternal Soul or Universal Self

With this realization the difference between the self and the other vanishes and the 'realized one' can then dedicate him to the service of others particularly the meek and lowly.

Vedantic doctrine which he interpreted in his own way by

- i) Rejecting exclusiveness in matters of belief
- ii) and all claims to monopoly of truth;
- iii) Accepting his Master's (Sri Ramakrishna's) syncretism, which generated in him the ideal of a universal religion;
- iv) Showing respect for all faiths and acknowledging them as true. It was very different from any patronizing tolerance of another man's belief and hence as a result he could say boldly

"India's doom was sealed the very day they invented the word *mlechha* and stopped from communion with others."

turned his idea about religion into a socio-cultural motif with three basic characteristics

- a) Piety;
- b) This-worldly morality and
- c) Cultural self-assertion

This was his reconstruction of '*Hindutva*' because he wanted to reorient religion to the service of humanity and

as a result his gospel of Vedanta became the basis of a universal religion and love for humanity.

As a *parivrajaka*, a travelling mendicant, he did discover the reality of Indian life and the horrors of hunger. He said on one occasion that he wished that he was a pariah and also a *parivrajaka*. It was the anguished empathy of a *sannyasi* with the starving *dalits* (suppressed) of India that he could say,

“Let each of us pray day and night for the downtrodden millions in India, who are held fast by poverty, priest craft, and tyranny and pray day and night for them. Let these people be your God.”

Out of this kind of thinking emerged the concept of *daridranarayana* (the poor as God) of Swami Vivekananda. In other words it was the concept of God, the man – God. He discovered God in every being that wears a human form. It was the discovery of God manifested in the poor.

Vivekananda was not a preacher. He did not want to spread a religion. He wanted to dedicate himself to alleviate poverty of the poor to make it a basis for national regeneration. It was not a call to bring With this realization the difference between the self and the other vanishes and the ‘realized one’ can then dedicate him to the service of others particularly the meek and lowly people under the fold of a religion or spread Hinduism. In his essay in Bengali on *manush chai* (seeking true human beings) he boldly said,,

“Instead of reciting Gita if the students go to play football that will bring them closure to heaven.”

Our need is to have a nation of physically strong people. A weak and degenerate subject race first needed the quality of *rajas*, vigorous pursuit of worldly ends.”

Swamiji had to fight , in a way, against an entire Hindu tradition in which charity might at times be considered a part of *Dharma* of the king or householder but whereas the *sannyasi*’s principle ideal was individual *moksha*, not improvement of the physical world. Consequently new meanings had to be given to the basic religious-philosophical concepts of Hinduism, which Swamiji did by reinterpreting these concepts. In fact, the inspiration,

as I have said earlier, came from his guru Sri Ramakrishna, who once admonished Naren to give up his selfish longing for total uninterrupted *Samadhi*, because he had duties to mankind and in this way created a new paradigm of service to mankind, which gave new meaning to *Karma yoga*, *Jnana Yoga* and Vedantic Oneness:

- a) Vivekananda turned the traditional notion of *karma* of caste-based rituals and obligations determined by previous birth into non-traditional social service.
- b) The *jnana* of Vedantic monism was sought to be transformed, through a real *tour de force*, into a message of strength and strenuous efforts to help others.
- c) The monistic unity of all beings, Vivekananda argued, implied that ‘in loving anyone, I am loving myself’. In fact this notion provided him a different kind of a design. He intertwined the *advaita* non-duality with the notion of *bhakti* or love-devotion centred on the deity as the mother Kali and in this way Vivekananda spoke both of non-dual one eternal and at the same time, by referring him as a devotee, expressed his love and devotion towards the personal deity, the mother Kali.

Vivekananda considered renunciation essential for true service to motherland. In fact spirituality and patriotism were evidently continuous in his awareness.

Vivekananda's approach was that firstly, we should develop spirituality within us to achieve our social and national goals. Analogically one can say that firstly we need the charioteer, Sri Krishna and then Arjuna, who sits on the chariot and goes for action. Firstly we need Sri Ramakrishna, dressed like a common man of India but epitome of spirituality and then Swami Vivekananda in ochre dress, who knows how to disseminate the message of spirituality in our national life. First we go to the common man of India in which resides the spirit of India and then to the man in ochre dress who manages to spread the message of spirituality in the world over.

Swamiji's message was very simple, just in one sentence he gave that message to the American women, 'Love, love gives you strength, love knows no fear.'

Swamiji was definite that for the regeneration of the people and the country one will have to stand against the ills like untouchability and degradation of women.

Ours is only ‘Don’t touchism’

Swamiji moved a step further and talked about the sin of neglecting the womanhood.

He once said,

“American women are free as birds in air and see our Women becoming mother below their teens....We are horrible sinners and our degradation is due to our calling women ‘despicable worms’, ‘gateway to hell’ and so forth.”

The upliftment of the poor, the untouchables and the women is possible by giving them education, to develop their lost individuality. This was Swamiji’s prescription and his watch word was,

“Education, education, education. I see it before my eyes, a nation is advanced to proportion as education and intelligence spread among the masses.”

Education is not to be taken as an object of study only but as a process for the development of the self, the knowing subject.

Today when we are facing serious challenges of environmental pollution, religious fundamentalism, violence, and erosion of moral values and tremendous

impact of Western popular culture which goes against our most important civilizational values, it is time, we remember our leaders like Swami Vivekananda, who signifies the religio-cultural continuity of the people of a nation so he could say in a simple language that

- i) Religion is the manifestation of the divinity already in man.
- ii) He could say that each soul is potentially divine.
- iii) The goal is to manifest this divinity within by controlling one's nature both internal and external.

During the Bengal Partition days the poet read a paper 'Avastha and byavastha' (problem and solution) in the Calcutta town hall in which he advocated the policy of establishing a parallel govt and said,

The terrifying image of the protector may protect us. We don't want charity – strike.

He wrote many songs during that time betraying similar ideas. There could be two reasons for the manifestation of this kind of militant nationalism. One was of course Jyotirindranath Tagore, his elder brother, who organised secret meetings for spreading the message of nationalistic

militancy in which Tagore also participated but more than that,

It is my hunch, that Tagore was influenced by another, one of the greatest figures of his time, Swami Vivevekananda, who sang Tagore songs in Brahmasamaj gatherings such as ‘I have made you the polestar of my life’ (tomarai koreachi jibaner dhrubatarara) or ‘The sky is the platter and the sun and moon are the lighted lamps’ (gaganer thale rabi-chandra-deepak jwale). Tagore met Narendranath Dutta turned Vivekananda in a tea party arranged by sister Nibedita on 27th Jan 1899 but must have exchanged glances then conversing with each because Tagore knew about Vivekananda’s firm belief that the literary creativity of the house of Tagors is not conducive for the development of masculinity in man. Swamiji would always say, in the present Indian condition forgetting the soft, sweet taste of poetry would not do us any harm. The hard truth is like the death image of Mother kali and not the happy love image of Krishna with flute in his hand. Then Swamiji made the most powerful statement, ‘Yes! The older I grow, the more everything seems to me to lie in manliness. That is my new gospel.’

Tagore was totally against idol worship and hence he was not favourable towards Swami Vivekananda but he had

personally noticed the tremendous revolutionary impact of Swamiji on the youth of India and after the death of Swami Vivekananda in 1902 Tagore spoke in high terms to Dilip Kumar Roy about Swamiji's acute sense of self respect. Tagore also recognised the great impact which Swamiji had on the awakening of the fighting spirit among the enslaved Indians and himself started writing poetry of militancy during the Bengal partition agitation (see Vivekananda o Samakaleen Bharatbarsha, Shankari Prasad Basu, vols iv, v, vi and vii.).

Doctrines or dogmas, or rituals, or books or temples, or forms are but secondary details. The ultimate goal of all mankind, the aim and end of all religions, is but one – union with God or what amounts to be the same, union with the divinity which reveals everyone's true nature. Isn't it Tagore also says same thing

**The Infinite wants the finite's intimate comradeship
And the finite wishes to lose itself in the Infinite.'**

In other words Tagore is speaking about
the idea of the humanity of our God or the divinity of man the eternal.

MAHALAYA is a sanskrit word derived from Maha meaning "Great" and Alaya meaning "the abode" or "Soul of the World". Together it translates as "The Great Abode, The Grand Residence, or The Dwelling of the Great Souls.

Meaning of Mahalaya is *homecoming*. According to the Hindu mythology, Goddess Durga who was married to Lord Siva returns to her paternal residence during the Puja, and this is the preparation for the welcome of the diving homecoming.

Mahalaya Amavasya day, there is a conjunction of the sun and the moon and that the sun enters the sign Virgo (Kanya). Tradition has it that on this day the departed ancestors leave their abode of Yama and come down to the earth to take their duly ordained rites from their descendants. The most vital difference between 'Funeral' rites and Shradha is that, while the funeral rites are considered inauspicious, the Shradha is considered as ritually auspicious and spiritually gratifying.