

Foundations of Indian Management as Envisaged by Swami Vivekananda

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Swami Vivekananda is mostly known as a spiritual leader but the main concern of Swami Vivekananda all through his life has been the economic prosperity of India. He sincerely tried to build a bridge between age old Indian moral and ethical approaches to life and modern economic needs of India.

A disciple of Sri Ramakrishna who uses to emphasize on service to people as a true service to God Swami Vivekananda gave the call to elevate the masses without injuring their religion and stressed on the fact that the fate of a nation depends upon the condition of masses. He use to say first make the people of the country stand on their legs by rousing their inner power, first let them learn to have good food and clothes and plenty of enjoyment – and then tell them how to be free from the bondage of enjoyment.” Writing to his fellow disciples in 1899 he wrote, “... *we want that energy, that love of independence, that spirit of self-sacrifice, that immovable fortitude, that dexterity in action, that bond of unity of purpose, that thirst for improvement*” (The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda, Volume V).

Swami Vivekananda who could not only understand the problems of the people but also suggested such measures which are of extreme relevance even today. He was concerned about agriculture and its improvement and wanted to educate the farmers as well as to modernize it by using technology. He talks of industrialization of the country at the same time he pleads for the continuance of small scale and cottage industry. He talks of trade but not aid. He suggests complete programme of poverty eradication based on Vedantic philosophy. He at the same time teaches us the universal oneness based on Advaita.

In 1957 when Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of Independent India, was trying to find out alternative model to communism as he found communism became too closely associated with the necessity of violence in the society. He was trying to get a solution of getting rid of class struggles and inequality and create a classless society with equal opportunities to all. There were two paths questioning his mind: methods of violence or peaceful means. Communism, as Pandit

Jawaharlal Nehru observed associated itself with violence at various behavioural levels. He sought the path by acknowledging Vedantic Philosophy as an alternative model of economic development.

Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru in his letter written on July 13, 1958 to the Chief Ministers' of India writes,

“The basic thing, I believe, is that wrong means will not lead to right results and that is no longer merely an ethical doctrine but a practical proposition. ... It is said that there is a sense of frustration and depression in India and the old buoyancy of spirit is not to be found, at a time when enthusiasm and hard work are most needed. This is not merely in evidence in our country. It is in a sense a world phenomenon. An old and valued colleague said that this is due to our not having a philosophy of life and indeed the world also is suffering from this lack of a philosophical approach. *In our efforts to ensure the material property of the country, we have not paid any attention to the spiritual element in human nature. Therefore, in order to give the individual and the nation a sense of purpose, something to live for and, if necessary, to die for, we have to revive some philosophy of life and give, in the wider sense of the word, a spiritual background to our thinking.* We talk of Welfare State and of democracy and socialism. They are good concepts but they hardly convey a clear and unambiguous meaning. This was the argument and then the question arose as to what our ultimate objective should be. Democracy and socialism are means to an end, not the end itself. We talk of the good of society. Is this something apart from the transcending the good of the individuals composing it? If the individual is ignored and sacrificed for what is considered the good of the society, is that the right objective to have?”

He further says,

“ ...It is right education and good health that will give the foundation for economic as well as cultural and spiritual progress....We have thus to do our own thinking, profiting by the example of others but essentially trying to find a path for ourselves suited to our own conditions. *In considering these economic aspects of our problems, we have always to remember the basic approach of peaceful means; and perhaps we might also keep in view the old Vedantic ideal of the life force which is the inner base of everything that exists.*”

Source: Basic Approach. Letter Written to Chief Ministers on July 13, 1958.

It was Swami Vivekananda who first called attention to establishing the linkage between age old Indian ethical and moral approaches to life and modern economic needs. He repeatedly said, “...the ethical considerations should play an important role during economic decision making” (Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda, Volume IV, p.368).

Swami Vivekananda emphasized the role of the state in ensuring a good quality of life for the common people. His concept for the masses came from his approach towards moral values and concern for their well being. He used to say, "...My idea is to show that the highest ideal of morality and unselfishness goes hand in hand with the highest metaphysical conception, and that you need not lower your conception to get ethics and morality, but, on the other hand, to reach a real basis of morality and ethics you must have the highest philosophical and scientific conceptions. Human knowledge is not antagonistic to human well-being. On the contrary, it is knowledge alone that will save us in every department of life...The more we know the better for us." (Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda, Volume II, p. 355).

The basis of a welfare state is the 'social awareness'. In an ideal socio-political system the issues of morality and unselfishness are important which can be build only when people are more conscious of the needs of the society rather than their small benefits. Swami Vivekananda opined that freedom is the only condition for growth and he emphasized on giving freedom to society to grow. Swami Vivekananda has given tremendous emphasis on 'social sector development. He (as quoted by Ghosh, 2006) considered that economic activities must be conducted keeping the ethical factors into consideration. He said "Karma –Yoga, therefore, is a system of ethics and religion intended to attain freedom through unselfishness, and by good works (p.22). Swami Vivekananda was in favour of positive approach from the government in order to accelerate economic development of India. Although he was in favour of governmental participation in the economic sphere but he advised that the state must be an actor who should assist agricultural as well as industrial development.

Unfortunately we have not given due attention to Swami Vivekananda's contribution in shaping the economic ideas of modern India. He was perhaps one of the foremost Indian economic thinkers who made sincere efforts to balance the ethical approaches with economic pursuits. However, this is not to undermine the contributions of engineering approach to economics. The detachment that has grown has between the two has been an unfortunate development for the entire world of economics (Ghosh, 2006, p.20).

Throwing light on Vivekananda's knowledge of the practical economic problems of India, Romain Rolland has significantly pointed out that , "He (Vivekananda) was conversant with the problems of industrial and rural economy whereby the life of the common man was controlled" (2010, p. 22).Sister Nivedita in her classic book *The Master as I saw Him: Being Pages from the Life of Swami Vivekananda (1910)* writes, "...Nowhere does his love seem more intense than as we passed across

the long stretches of the plains covered with fields and farms and villages. Here his thought was free to brood over the land as a whole and he would spend hours explaining the communal system of agriculture, or describing life of the farm housewife..." (pp.88-89).

It is apt to quote the letter written by Swami Vivekananda on 26th August 1896 from Switzerland to Shri Nanjunda Rao,

"...All combined efforts in India sink under the weight of one inequity – we have not yet developed strict business principles. Business is business, in the highest sense, and no friendship – or as the Hindu proverb says, "eye shame" – should be there. One should keep the clearest account of everything in one's charge – and never, never, apply the funds intended for one thing to any other use whatsoever – even if one starves the next moment. This is business integrity. Next, energy unflinching. Whatever you do let that be your worship for the time..." (Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda, Volume 5, p.114).

Swami Vivekananda talked about two basic pillars of business: Transparency and accountability towards fund and unflinching energy to perform work as worship. Sri Sri Ramakrishna use to say, *"If a man has the conviction that God alone is the Doer and he is His instrument, then he cannot do anything sinful. He who has learnt to dance correctly never makes a false step..."* (The Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, 1942). Swami Vivekananda (the disciple of Sri Ramakrishna) in his letter dated September 27, 1894 from USA writes to Alasingha, *"I care only for the spirit – when that is right everything will be righted by itself..."*(Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda, Volume V, p. 46). Again on October 27, 1894 Swami Vivekananda wrote to Alasingha, *"...Always depending on the Lord and making no plans ahead... Take care of these two things – love of power and jealousy. Cultivate always "faith in yourself".* (Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda, Volume V, pp.51-52).

Influence of the Ideology of Swami Vivekananda on Modern India

Mr. Jamsetji Tata

Jamsetji Tata was more than merely an entrepreneur who helped India take her place in the league of industrialized nations. He was a patriot and a humanist whose ideals and vision shaped an exceptional business conglomerate. Swami Vivekananda had tremendous impact on Jamsetji Tata. On 23rd November 1898 the latter writes a letter to Swami Vivekananda,



ESPLANADE HOUSE
BOMBAY

Nov. 23. 1898

Dear Swami Vivekananda,

I trust, you remember me as a fellow-traveller on your voyage from Japan to Chicago. I very much recall at this moment your views on the growth of the ascetic spirit in India, and the duty, not of destroying, but of diverting it into useful channels.

I recall these ideas in connection with my scheme of Research Institute of Science for India, of which you have doubtless heard or read. It seems to me that no better use can be made of the ascetic spirit than the establishment of monasteries or residential halls for men dominated by this spirit, where they should live with ordinary decency, and devote their lives to the cultivation of sciences—natural and humanistic. I am of opinion that, if such a crusade in favour of an asceticism of this kind were undertaken by a competent leader, it would greatly help asceticism, science, and the good name of our common country; and I know not who would make a more fitting general of such a campaign than Vivekananda. Do you think you would care to apply yourself to the mission of galvanizing into life our ancient traditions in this respect? Perhaps, you had better begin with a fiery pamphlet rousing our people in this matter. I should cheerfully defray all the expenses of publication.

Swami Vivekananda, in his backing of the idea, wrote in 1899, *"I am not aware if any project at once so opportune and so far reaching in its beneficent effect has ever been mooted in India... The scheme grasps the vital point of weakness in our national well-being with a clearness of vision and tightness of grip, the mastery of which is only equaled by the munificence of the gift that is being ushered to the public."* Despite this and similar endorsements, it would take a further 12 years before the splendid Indian Institute of Science started functioning in Bangalore in 1911 (Chakraborty & Chakraborty, 2006, p31).

Jamsetji's philanthropic principles were rooted in the belief that for India to climb out of poverty its finest minds would have to be harnessed. Therefore, they kept on building the temples of learning.

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The Malaise of Modern Organizations and The Role of Greed

The relentless pursuit of egoistic gratification has led to the current situation of corporate greed and lack of trust amongst people as reported in the cases mentioned above. Corporate ethics in bureaucracies have tended to be depersonalized with managers and employees, expected to place company interests before their own private interests with their ultimate fealty to society. The trusteeship theory of Mahatma Gandhi defines a practical context for the owners of wealth to reach towards the unitive, cosmocentric consciousness.

The declining graph of the organizations took place because of greed and covetousness of the players. Such unethical practices have a great bearing on the internal as well as external environment of the organization. It creates a culture of intra-psychic conflict. Therefore, it requires good governance. Good governance is a state of mind. The top management needs to move out either from the frame of mind that they are above all or the law does not apply to them.

The culture of the workplace has a role to play in its downfall. The unbelievably aggressive way of getting business - 'too-good-to-be-true-performance' caused lack of focus, clarity and accountability. As a result the entire environment became greed driven leading to unhealthy work culture.

The dominant philosophy in business is to maximize shareholder value. Michael Douglas's academy award winning performance in claiming that "Greed is Good" in the movie Wall Street still appears to be the mantra of businesses big and small. The author in one of her studies (Singh- Sengupta, 2002) made efforts to understand how do the organizations maintain their sustainable competitive advantage by using organizational existentialism approach. This approach incorporates organization responsibilities and duties towards both, the internal community, which comprises of people who work there and the larger community where it is located. She writes, "...The benefits of high – integrity and high – responsibility organizations are well-established conscience mechanisms that emphasize on fair practices which are manifested in responsible decision making and organizational citizenship behaviour. This cannot be possible unless and until the organization adopt a reflective approach in its managerial style. The reflective managerial style on the one hand provides caring climate to the organization where members freely interact and have a free frank dialogue and on the other hand is aware of the purpose of its existence in the society" (p.301).

Transparency in the organization can be perceived when it has fair practices and high standards of business ethics, which is manifested in its day-to-day dealings. Auditing of the business environmental ethical social and profitability bottom lines will enable the business to make a difference to the continuous improvement of the organization. And in doing that, to make continuous improvement to overall society (Birch, 2000).

Business is a socio-cultural activity, which impacts the lives of many more people than actually involved in the work, or directly benefit from the profits and share dividends of the company. The business need to redefine the way in which a company sees itself, away from a rigid adherence to a narrowly focused 'single' bottom line, with companies seeing themselves as responsible only to their shareholders, towards a more socially, ethically and environmentally aware definition of themselves as a company 'doing business in the public eye'.

Creating culture by doing business in public is, therefore, a powerful catalyst for establishing a sustainable society, where everyone is recognised as a legitimate stakeholder able to comment openly. Such openness is therefore, a public conversation that takes place as a part of a public culture and this lies at the heart of corporate citizenship, because it is participation in this public conversation, which defines public culture as expressive citizenship (Birch, 2000). Neal (1999) writes, "... We are actually in the midst of an important paradigm shift as the last vestiges of defunct industrial era practices prepare to fall. We are experiencing the beginning of a transformation in the workplace. This is not the latest fad but a genuine recognition that the workplace has an important role to play in our need for wholeness and integration"(p. 28). This paves the way for a conscious-business movement.

Corporate Prosperity Through Evolution & Involution

Swami Vivekananda said,

"...It is in the very nature of things to manifest themselves. The momentum is not from outside, but comes from inside. He further says, '...each evolution presupposes an involution. We know that the sum total of energy that is displayed in the universe is the same at all times, and that matter is indestructible.' 'Everything begins', he adds, 'as it were, from certain seeds, certain rudiments, certain fine forms, and becomes grosser and grosser as it develops; and then again it goes back to that fine form and subsides.'

References

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