

## Module 2 : Swami Vivekananda

### Section 2 : Nature Of Man

*Man = physical + spiritual*

In this one line, we can sum up Vivekananda's views on the nature of man. But, before we elaborate on that, we need to see what is meant by nature of man? By nature of man is meant that essence, that core whereby a living being is called a human being! What is that defining characteristic of a human being which distinguishes it from rest of the creation? That distinguishing character is called the *essence* of a thing. For example, being salty is the essence of salt such that if salt loses its saltiness, it is no more a salt, but something else. An essence is that without which a thing ceases to be that. As saltiness is the very nature of salt, so every other thing has its own nature without which it ceases to be that.

Like divergence of opinion about the nature of ultimate reality, so are available strikingly different views on the real nature of a human being. Some consider the physical constitution of man to be essential nature. This physical constitution includes its body and having a brain. They don't believe in anything called spirit or soul in man. These thinkers are called materialists. Some other hold that not body, or brain, but it's the soul that is the essence of man because even animals have a body and a brain and sometimes because of his behavior, man becomes less than even a brute. We often chide people with, "why are you behaving like a brute?" It is the essential purity of the man's soul which is his essence. These people hold that this soul is the spark of Divine, that is, every soul is separated from the divine Ultimate Reality. Every soul is divine therefore and worthy of equal respect. The body is rather considered a prison in which this soul is trapped. Its liberation lies in rejoining with the God after death. Those who believe in the reality of the soul over the body are spiritualists. But, owing to massive scientific progress, and the views of the psychologist, Sigmund Freud, some people argued that it is man's mind which is its essence. The mind which is composed of conscious and unconscious parts is the distinguishing feature not only between man and other animals, but between men and men also. Because of the complex history of the development of this mind, right since from birth, every man is different from the other. There is nothing called soul. Soul is rather the same thing as mind; while ancients called it soul, modern scientists called it mind.

But in the context of man, the question of finding real nature is not just finding what man is composed of as what salt is composed of and so on. Its need arises because of the apparent diversity and illusions in the world. Our senses through which we perceive the world are notoriously unreliable. They at times furnish us the data which is not real. They present us the long, twisting body of a snake, and upon examining, it turns out to be just a rope. Such illusions force us to reflect – what is the real nature of the object that is present before our eyes? This conveniently extends us asking – what is the real nature of the world itself? To our own selves, we turn skeptic some times as when we ask – who am I? Does myself consist of this body only or is there anything over and above the body? To enquire into the *real I*, is to enquire about the real nature of *ourselves*. Vivekananda starts enquiring about the real nature of man precisely from this point.

Vivekananda rejects all these lopsided approaches heretofore and considers man's nature to be both physical and spiritual. Unlike other ancient philosophers of India, Vivekananda never rejected the physical aspects of man. Indian philosophies like Vedas, Sankhya, Advaita, Jainism etc. have all degraded the physical body of man as a kind of trap or prison house for the eternally free soul. Body has been considered a cage in which the bird-soul gets imprisoned, and upon, salvation or *Mukti*, it gets free and submerged in the Divine.

Vivekananda rejecting this degrading approach to the body, considered it an equally important aspect of man. Though, he too maintained that real nature of man is spiritual, he did not neglect the physical aspect. But the essence or core of a human being is his Atman or his soul which distinguishes him from rest of the creation and among other humans as well. Vivekananda called this *Atman*, the *Soul Force*. It is not equal to the mind as Freud said. It is a soul force that drives the body. Analyzing the relation between body, mind and soul, Vivekananda maintains that body is just a shell, and mind is that something that acts for a brief while soul maintains its individuality throughout.<sup>8</sup> Mind, he connects it to the physical aspect of man, and soul, to be in the driver seat. Immediately, however, he warns that though soul makes the body work, it has not emerged out of it as materialists hold. Materialists, even if they believed in soul, would assert that ultimately the matter is real, and soul, if any, has emerged out of the combination of atoms. But, "To say that the force called soul is the outcome of combinations of the molecules of the body is putting the cart before the horse," as it could be asked, "how did the combinations come? Where was the force to make them?"<sup>9</sup> Thus, Vivekananda rules out the possibility of emergence of soul from the matter, but does not rule out their co-habitation. The two cohabit side by side, with one having the edge over the other.

<sup>8</sup> Swami Vivekananda, *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Advaita Ashrama, Publication Department, Kolkata, Vol. 3, p. 498

<sup>9</sup> Swami Vivekananda, *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Advaita Ashrama, Publication Department, Kolkata, Vol. 2, p. 76

This soul force or Atman is of divine nature. This is neither body, nor mind. It has neither shape, nor color – it is thus *formless*. It is not located at one single point in the body, rather pervades throughout the body. It is *timeless* – time is irrelevant to it, hence it is eternal. Causation can't exist without time, but it does not enter into any cause-effect chain, hence it is beyond causation also. So, if it is formless, timeless and beyond causation, then naturally, it is infinite. But there can't be two infinities. Ultimate Reality or Brahman is already admitted to be infinite, so soul can't said to be another. It must be one and the same as Brahman. Through this, Vivekananda brings out the equation between soul and ultimate reality, Atman and Brahman and thereby sketches the nature of man as, "The Real Man, therefore, is one and infinite, the omnipresent Spirit."<sup>10</sup> All the human beings, who are instantiations of that great Spirit, are called Apparent Man by Vivekananda.

<sup>10</sup> Swami Vivekananda, *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Advaita Ashrama, Publication Department, Kolkata, Vol. 2, p. 78

He gives some distinctions between real and the apparent man. Apparent Man is merely the manifestation and a limitation of the Real Man. He is just a spark of the divinity, its, 'dim reflection'. Whereas the Apparent Man is bound to time and causation, Real Man is beyond time and cause-effect. Since Real Man is beyond time-space, cause-effect bondages, he enjoys infinite freedom as compared to Apparent Man who is bound to life-death cycles. On this aspect, Indian philosophers especially have argued that this bondage of the apparent man is only superficial. This is because, even if he is mere spark of divinity, his soul is of the same essence as that of Brahman. As such, soul too is infinite and omniscient. Only due to its short-term bondage with the body here on earth, it has to go through all the bondages of the body and therefore appears bound. But, in reality, soul is free and eternal. And that sustains the hope throughout Indian philosophy that everybody can attain his salvation. By admitting essential freedom of the soul, Indian philosophers made salvation *Nirvana* or *Mukti* logically possible for the seekers. Consequently, there is nothing called life-death for the soul as it is eternal. Vivekananda here gives the example of few children who asked, "Why does not the earth fall?" To which some replied because of gravitation and other things like that. But one girl put the question, "Where should it fall?" This appears to be nonsense, because, "Where should the earth fall? There is no falling or rising for the earth. In infinite space there is no up and down; that is only in the relative. Where is going or coming for the infinite? Whence should it come and whither should it go?"<sup>11</sup> Vivekananda is saying here exactly what the great scientist world has ever seen, Albert Einstein explained in his Theory of Relativity. As there is no falling and rising for the earth, there is no getting born and dying for the soul. It is eternal and essentially out of bondage.

<sup>11</sup> Swami Vivekananda, *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Advaita Ashrama, Publication Department, Kolkata, Vol. 2, p. 79

Thus, Real Man is not the body which Apparent Man ties himself to; it is the Spirit. Mind and Body are mere names of the phenomena undergo ceaseless changing throughout their existence. The states of the body (childhood, adulthood to old age) and states of the mind (happy, sad, dull, active etc) are constantly in flux. And it is natural also given the finitude of the body and mind. Only finite things change, and not the infinite. As such, bodies change, not the Spirit. Every particle in the universe undergoes change, not universe as a whole. This infinite Unit which is unchangeable, Vivekananda equates it with Real Man and asserts that our reality lies in being the Universal, and not the finite. The individuality that people seek and painstakingly strive to maintain is only possible in the Infinite as only infinite Spirit or Brahman is non-changing. Apparent Man struggles throughout his life to achieve a unique status among hordes of others like him, it is his quest to realize his individuality. This according to Vivekananda is possible only in realizing the Real Man as alone he is out of the changing boundaries of the apparent man. That is why, so much thrust upon self-realization in Indian philosophy.

Spirituality, in Vivekananda, is actually that aspect of man which relates to its potentialities – everything higher, and finer that man can be in future, if he strives. Vivekananda compares man to be the lion who, because of his upbringing among sheep after the death of its mother, forgot that it is a lion and behaves like a sheep only. Only then it realizes its *true self* of lion when another lion comes forward and show it, its reflection in water. To mankind, thus coax Vivekananda, "You are lions, you are souls, pure, infinite, and perfect. The might of the universe is within you."<sup>12</sup> This making of effort is way to self-realization. Since this is inherent in man, man is always struggling to achieve yet unknown.

Religion is the expression of this struggle of man. Self-realization is in everyone's power to achieve.

<sup>12</sup> Swami Vivekananda, *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Advaita Ashrama, Publication Department, Kolkata, Vol. 2, p. 87

But, it could be asked as this juncture, ***what might this self-realization constitute of? The lion in the story realized its lion-ness in its self-realization, what should man realize?***

Vivekananda here answers that man's self-realization constitutes of realizing the divinity in him, that equation with the ultimate reality Brahman as Spirit. It is to realize that Self is the cause of all our actions, yet itself it is uncaused. It is self-caused. Since time, space, and causation does not matter to self, it is unfettered and enjoys complete freedom. Freedom is essentially connected with immortality.<sup>13</sup> The moment we realize that we are not caused by factors other than ourselves, we rise above laws of nature which then does not become fetters of our existence.

One may ask ***what would it bring as benefit?***

Self-realization makes man aware of his perfection which is his inherent nature, but which, he has forgotten. "The inexorable of law of science proves that the soul is individual and must have perfection within itself, the attainment of which means freedom, not salvation, and the realization of individual infinity."<sup>14</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Swami Vivekananda, *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Advaita Ashrama, Publication Department, Kolkata, Vol. 6, p. 84

<sup>14</sup> Swami Vivekananda, *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Advaita Ashrama, Publication Department, Kolkata, Vol. 3, p. 499

One may ask ***whether everyone can pursue it?***

Vivekananda emphatically answers in positive and says that the freedom is inherent core of Atman. Man is essentially free, only he does not know it as the lion-cub did not know about its true self of being a lion. "We are free; the work is to know it. We must give up all slavery. The idea of freedom is the only true idea of salvation – freedom from everything, the senses, whether of pleasure or pain, from good as well as evil."<sup>15</sup> It is to be borne in mind as ever that Vivekananda is not asking about giving up all work, become a do-nothing *sanyasi* and renounce the world. Some might interpret this call for, 'freedom from everything' as encouragement to renunciation like hermits do. Vivekananda's call is not to give up work, but do work in a more detached fashion so that pain or pleasure of sense does not bind man to its fruits. His call is to do, what Bhagvad Gita called, *Nishakam Karma* – doing things in a detached way. The moment we get detached, we perform work without thinking about its pleasurable or painful consequences. Our whole energy and mind is fixed up in doing work only. Like Gita then, Vivekananda's philosophy is full of activism, and not renunciation. In the same lecture, he again asserts, "You are the soul, free and eternal, ever free, ever blessed. Have faith enough and you will be free in a minute. Everything in time, space and causation is bound.... Not the soul."<sup>16</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Swami Vivekananda, *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Advaita Ashrama, Publication Department, Kolkata, Vol. 6, p. 93

<sup>16</sup> Swami Vivekananda, *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Advaita Ashrama, Publication Department, Kolkata, Vol. 6, p. 93

Immediately, it arises in our mind, as to ***what are the means to attain that self-realization?***

Swami Vivekananda proposed the method of *Yoga* to help man attain this self-realization. Yoga is the science of maintaining our bodies and mind fit and healthy, free of various distortions like ailments which could be both physical and mental. It is the art of taking control of our body as well as mind, getting hold of our mental concentration and directs it to realizing the true nature of self when it is free from the distorting influences of the outside world. There are many sub-disciplines of Yoga which cater to different needs at a time like - Jnana Yoga (the path of knowledge), Karma Yoga (the path of action), Bhakti Yoga (the path of worshipping the personal aspect of the ultimate reality or God) and Raja Yoga (the path of concentration of mind). All these sub-disciplines are complementary to each other, and are not in hierarchy. No one is better than the other. We can realize ourselves through attaining knowledge also, as our Vedas and Upnishads instruct. These scriptures instructed the study of scriptures as the only way to achieve self-realization. Later, the philosophy of action in the Bhagvad

Gita emphasized doing work in a detached way; that is, Karma Yoga. The *astika* systems like Advaita, Vishistadvaita, put more emphasis on worshipping the personal God or Ishwara like Krishna, or Shiva as the way to achieve that. Raja Yoga is about concentrating the mind. But as Vivekananda repeatedly maintains mind is not distinct from body. Its practice starts therefore from controlling body first of all. Therefore, the emphasis on sitting postures or physical exercises to maintain the health of the body. A healthy mind can't subsist in an unhealthy body. Raja Yoga contains both ways to achieve mental as well as physical well-being. Consequently, Vivekananda gives more emphasis to Raja Yoga.

Vivekananda compares Raja Yoga to any science of the world. It is, "an analysis of the mind, a gathering of facts of the supersensuous world and so building up the spiritual world."<sup>17</sup> It is about having, "actual perception of the spiritual truths" which every great prophet of the world had. This perception, says Vivekananda, "is obtained by Yoga... concentration of the mind is the source of all knowledge. Yoga teaches us to make matter our slave, as it ought to be. Yoga means "yoke", "to join", that is to join the soul of man with the supreme Soul or God." But, since man's soul is tied to the physical body, it needs to be under control till the true realization dawns upon man. Yoga does precisely that. It helps man to control his body and mind for the purpose of his self-realization.

<sup>17</sup> Swami Vivekananda, *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Advaita Ashrama, Publication Department, Kolkata, Vol. 8, p. 37