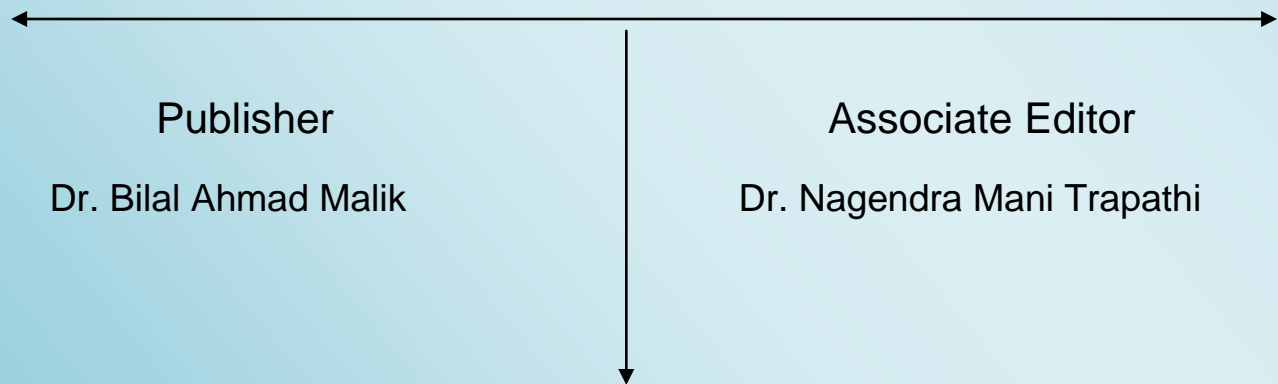


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VIVEKANANDA'S CONCEPT OF SOCIAL WELFARE

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In this paper I shall make an attempt to understand and explain Vivekananda's concept of social welfare. The moral teaching of Swami Vivekananda stands supreme as regards to the social influence in our modern society. Swami Vivekananda was a great man and a great socialist. He wanted to create a great humanistic society which is without discrimination, selfishness, inequality, injustice and violence. He made an important contribution to the welfare of humanity. He actually wanted to create a new order of humanity through social service which sincerely lived in God and the brotherhood of mankind. Social welfare is generally regarded as the well-being of the entire society. The concept of social welfare is not the same as standard of living, but it is more concerned with the good quality of life, which includes some basic factors of lives of the individual human beings such as the quality of overall environment, status or level of crime, extent of drug abuse, availability of basic needs and also of essential social services, and religious and spiritual aspect of human lives. There is a view which tells us that social welfare in its narrow sense may be regarded as those non-profit public or voluntary functions of society which are clearly aimed at alleviating distress and poverty or at ameliorating the conditions of the casualties of society. Social welfare usually denotes the full range of organised activities of voluntary and governmental agencies that seek to prevent, alleviate or contribute to the solution of recognised social problems, or to improve the well-being of individuals, groups or communities.

According to United Nations, social welfare as an organized function is described as "a body of activities designed to enable individuals, families, groups and communities to cope with the social problems of changing conditions. But in addition to and extending beyond the range of its responsibilities for specific services, social welfare has a further function within the broad area of a country's social development. In this larger sense, social welfare should play a major role in contributing to the effective mobilization and deployment of human and material resources of the country to deal successfully with the social requirements of change, thereby participating in nation-building."

Social welfare is sometimes said to embrace laws, programmes, benefits and services which address social needs accepted as essential to the well-being of a society. It focuses on personal and social problems, both existing and

potential. It also plays an important developmental role by providing an organized system of services, and institutions which are designed to aid individuals and groups to achieve satisfying roles in life and personal relationship which permit them to develop their full capacities and to promote their well-being in harmony with the needs and aspirations of their families and communities.

There are many social issues and problems regarding homelessness, poverty, starvation, malnutrition, diseases, divorces, theft, illiteracy, racial discrimination, gender issues, corruption, etc., which need social welfare so as to bring solution to the problems. The present work is an attempt to understand and analyze the concept of social welfare. It aims at understanding the importance and relevance of social welfare in the modern society with special reference to the conception of social welfare of Swami Vivekananda. Social welfare is an investment by society in human beings. Money spent and taxes levied become a form of human interaction, making welfare different from farm subsidies or improvement to the nation's infrastructure. Many studies have been carried out on social welfare, but these studies are mostly empirical in nature. But, the present study on social welfare will primarily be analytical one.

Many people see social welfare as the role of a just society to provide its members with their basic needs. Yet many others find taxing productive workers to subsidize the less productive tantamount to theft. They argue that people are free to provide for themselves and should be held responsible for their actions if they do not.

As in the U.N. Universal Declaration of Human Rights, basic needs are typically understood as "food, clothing, housing, and medical care." All people have a right to such goods, the argument continues, and should be provided with them if they do not already possess them.

In this view, government is responsible for organizing the redistribution of the goods necessary to satisfy all society members' basic needs or of the money to purchase these goods - hence, the social welfare system. The argument for welfare maintains that the satisfaction of basic needs is of greater moral importance than an individual's right to spend earnings as he or she freely chooses. The issue, welfare proponents' claim, is not merely a clashing of societal rights but a matter of life and death, malnutrition and nourishment, disease and health, ignorance and education.

According to welfare proponents, welfare does not decrease people's motivation to work, as Gingrich argues. Rather, it gives them the opportunity to participate more productively in their society. In this regard, philosopher

Peter Singer writes, "If it is in our power to prevent something bad from happening, without thereby sacrificing anything of comparable moral importance, we ought, morally, to do it." For Singer, social welfare is not only a "good thing to do," it is a moral imperative.

According to Swami Vivekananda, social service or social welfare is not only ameliorative service, but also all types of social action for all round social welfare of the humanity. In other words, social reforms and social work are all included in his theory of service. The thrust point in this theory is that humans are to worship God in man by rendering social service to the latter; he pointed out the word 'Daridra Narayan', which means 'God in the form of the poor and asked us to serve him'. Vivekananda often used to say, "If you want to find God serve man".¹ He asked people to worship and offer the poor what they offered to image of God in the temple. To him, altruistic service or livings, acting for others are the only religion and all other ceremonial practices are sheer madness. The whole force of Vivekananda's argument was to bring home to mankind that religion consisted of service and renunciation for services. He was peculiar minded in his outlook and philosophy. He had fullest love for all and said, "Love makes no distinction between man and man, between a Brahmin and a pariah nor even between man and woman, love makes the whole universe as one's own home".²

For Vivekananda, service is regarded as worship. His earliest attempts to promote organized service to humanity were characterised by practical instructions of those held to be responsible for neglecting the needy. Vivekananda's language is revealing when considered in relationship to his popular image as a thoroughgoing Advaitin. He declared in a letter of August 1894, "throw your ceremonials overboard and worship the living God and the Man-God....God in his universal as well as individual aspect. The universal aspect of God means this world, and worshipping it means serving it...."³ I shall make an attempt to understand and explain Vivekananda's concept of social welfare. Swami Vivekananda made important contributions to the welfare of humanity. According to him, "Devotion to the mother is the root of all welfare". He said, "Our supreme duty is to advance to world freedom- physical, mental and the spiritual and help others to do so". It was Swami Vivekananda who was to promote for self-respect of women and wanted no men to tremble upon it, in terms of the caste system although he was against untouchability. According to Vivekananda, "The ideal of womanhood in India is motherhood-that marvellous, unselfish, all-suffering, ever-forgiving mother"⁴. He says, "It is unfair to judge women in the east by the western standard. In the west woman is the wife; in the east she is the mother."⁵ In India the woman was the visible manifestation of God and that her whole life was given up to the thought that she was a mother, and to be a perfect mother she must be chaste. He pointed out that almost all civilizations of the world

were first governed and controlled by the priestly classes. He strongly believed that the women should be educated and that any decision regarding the welfare of widows and women should be in the hands of the women themselves. He actually wanted to create new order of humanity through service which sincerely lived in God and the brotherhood of mankind. To him, monistic life was not a limitation but means of liberation. Monistic life liberated him from family and social bond and made him free to devote his life to service to humanity.

Vivekananda's Concepts of Social Welfare in the Modern Society is very relevant in the modern human society. In fact, the whole of his public life was a continual act of self-sacrifice at the altar of love of humanity. During the period of his public life Vivekananda made important contributions to the welfare of humanity. A phrase now much associated with Vivekananda's philosophy of service is 'Daridra Narayan', usually translated as 'let the poor be your God', also offers a personalistic representation of God. In response to Swami Akhandananda's request for guidance about undertaking service to humanity, Vivekananda wrote, 'You have read "Look upon your mother as God, look upon your father as God"- but I say--- the poor, the illiterate, the ignorant, the afflicted-let these be your God." Know that service to these alone is the highest religion'.⁶ In a nutshell, it can be said that Vivekananda's concept of social welfare through his excellent works on Religious harmony, Education, Service and Social issues is very relevant even today. But this kind of social work is not new in India. At various times in the country's past before Vivekananda, Reformers, Philosophers and Saints had attempted to bring about social improvement and even during the times Vivekananda lived, there were others like him. Now a days, to many people duty seems to mean helping self but not others, and service means service for self. But, being social and rational being, we are required to help others so as to sustain human society for a long time. In this connection, Vivekananda advised his countrymen to serve man as God. In fact, the whole of his public life was a continual act of self sacrifice at the altar of love of humanity. In a nutshell, Vivekananda's concept of social welfare through his excellent works on religious harmony, education, service and social issues like women empowerment, poverty, etc. is very relevant in the modern human society. Man as a social being whose very survival as an individual and a species depends upon the co-operation and help of other human beings.

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