

Swami Vivekananda's Concept of Management: An Assessment

K.P. Singh^{a*}, S.K. Singh^a, V.S. Shukla^b

a*. Department of Humanities, O.P. Jindal University, Raigarh

a. Department of Humanities, O.P. JIT, Raigarh

b. Department of English, DAV College, Kanpur

Abstract

Present research paper concentrates on the Vivekananda's concept of the management. The Indian traditions endow with a very rich of concepts and thoughts in the realm of personality development and leadership. These thoughts have been presented exclusively in the Vedas and Upanishads, which are the richest sources of understanding personality development and leadership in ancient Indian thoughts. The issues of self, soul, human nature, human existence, and human experience in terms of what they are, what they mean, how they are determined, their manifestation in the human being and their role in reconciling personality development form the core themes around which personality development can be understood according to the ancient philosophical tradition. Swami Vivekananda's concept of development of personality is very much influenced by this philosophical perception. Vivekananda's speeches and writings deal with various aspects of life which go beyond the barriers of caste and creed, colour and community, time and clime and having a universal appeal. Vivekananda believes that growth in human personality during recorded time has been social rather than biological; it has proceeded not by heritable variations in the species, but mostly by social, intellectual and moral innovation transmitted to individuals and generations by imitation, custom or education.

Keywords: Management, Personality Development, Leadership, Self, Success, etc.

"Arise, awake and stop not till the goal is reached."

—Swami Vivekananda

Introduction

When we speak of Swamiji as 'the Great Innovator of the concept of Management', we must remember that during Swamiji's time the science of management did not exist. Generally management is nothing but organized common sense, and that is from time immemorial. When nations became industrialized and new markets and products were discovered, industries and companies grew and exploited labour; tycoons and powerful politicians started

*Corresponding Author: Email: kp.singh@OPJIT.edu.in

making the rules and therefore money. The science of management started only after the World War I. It first went into organizing labour, work measurement, work study, production, and productivity. Then slowly other departments came up. According to Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary, "Management is the act or skill of dealing with people or situations in successful way" (p. 935). Latest management techniques like 'values-based management' that we know, Swamiji unconsciously practised them. There is a beautiful book called *The Power of Ethical Management* by Kenneth Blanchard and Norman Vincent Peale, where it is written on the cover "You need not cheat in order to win", And one of the paragraph starts with the sentence "To work only for profits is like playing tennis with your eyes on the scoreboard rather than on the ball." Therefore we have to give emphasis on values. Second, not only profit, but the method in which we are making that profit. Swamiji opines about the value-based management that if one really wants to succeed, one must have credibility. Credibility will come when one practices values. And his words are proving prophetic.

When we think of the great leaders in the history, we find the common characteristic in them that is their charismatic personality which is influencing generations and "the degree of unselfishness marks the degree of success everywhere" (V.420). Personality is not physical appearance or strength. It is not brain power or intellectual capacity. According to Swamiji, personality is deeper than that. Personality is related to will power, "it is the will power that moves the world" (V.47). Further he speaks, "a pure and a strong will is omnipotent" (III.224) soul or atma of human being. An American paper *New York Critique* referred to him as "an orator by divine right". Still more handsome is the tribute paid by the well-known poetess, the late Harriet Monroe, who was for many years editor of *Poetry* a magazine of verse. Miss Monroe attended the World Fair in 1893, and years later in her autobiography, *A Poet's Life* recorded her impressions of the Parliament of Religions and of Swamiji, "But the handsome monk in the orange robe gave us in perfect English a masterpiece. His personality, dominant, magnetic, his voice, rich as a bronze bell; the controlled fervour of his feeling; the beauty of his message to the Western world he was facing for the first time—these combined to give us a rare and perfect moment of supreme emotion. It was human eloquence at its highest pitch" (59-60). There are lots of personality development courses today. Behavioural science is an important area of discussion in modern times. We read lot of books on this subject written by Western management gurus. Swami Vivekananda wrote on personality development more than 100 years ago. Management gurus and researchers should understand the approach of Vivekananda. Supreme value of youth period is incalculable and indescribable. Youth life is the most precious life. Youth is the best time. The way in which you utilize this period will decide the nature of coming years that lie ahead of you. Your happiness, your success, your honour and your good name all depend upon the way in which you live now, in this present period as Swamiji said, "Happiness belongs to him who knows this oneness, who knows he is one with the universe" (I.374). This wonderful period of the first state of your life is related to you as the soft wet clay in the hands of the potter. Skilfully the potter gives it the right and

correct shapes and forms, which he intends to give. Even so, you can wisely mould your life, your character, your physical health and strength, in short your entire nature in any way in which you make up your mind to do. And you must do this now. To Swamiji, "you are the self, and that must be realized" (IV.245). It is easy to understand body and brain. But the soul or atma is deeper one and also finer one. This is the root of everything in human being. Controlling this root is important to control everything, "nothing else exists but the self" (VII.195). He who knows and controls his own mind knows the secret of every mind. Vivekananda says that the body and brain are temporary. Souls are immortal. Swamiji says that everybody is searching for God and divinity outside. But divinity resides in every soul. If we understand this spirit there will be harmony around us.

Vivekananda's Concept of Management

Swamiji spoke that the true management for the success of any organization is obedience, "the first requisite for organization is obedience" (VI. 321). Further, he says, "everyone wants to command, and no one wants to obey" (III. 134). "The first thing which is needed is obedience" (VI. 322). While speaking about personality Swami Vivekananda has emphasized on physical, mental and spiritual personality. He said, "Be strong my friends, you will be nearer to heaven through football than through the study of the *Bhagavad Gita*." This should not be misunderstood that he was against the studying of any religious scripture. To develop our personality, we need to learn from both happiness and pain. "Pain has its uses" (III. 78). Sometimes we learn more from pain. Man's character is the collective expression of past experiences. These experiences result in habits. Swamiji says that we need to have vairagya to change our habits to develop a better character and "the only remedy for bad habits is counter habits" (I. 208). Swamiji also teaches us how to control our negative emotions and always be willing to learn, "the object of life is to learn" (II. 502). But he was against the nature of so-called religious practitioners. He was against the nature of people, who sleeping in lethargy under the name of satvik (pious and balanced) nature and wearing the garb of religion proclaim themselves as the sole defenders of dharma. In another place he said, "Strength is life and weakness is death" (V. 409). Strength is felicity and immortal; weakness is constant strain and misery" (II. 3). The strength which Swamiji was expecting is physical, mental and spiritual. Speaking about mental personality Swami Vivekananda strongly emphasized on mental freedom. "Freedom, O Freedom! Freedom, O Freedom! Is the song of the soul" (I. 335). This simply means everybody has to strive hard to gain mastery over mind and better the power of concentration. Further he added that difference between animal and man is the difference in their power of thinking. "As soon as his thinking power goes, he becomes no better than an animal" (III. 359). Along with concentration of mind, will power is another important facet of mental personality. The remedy to destroy weakness of anything is not by brooding over it but by thinking of strength and through positive and constructive activities. The effort for creating our personality has to continue for a long time without any lethargy or frustration. It is like avoiding any stain on

a brass vessel otherwise one has to clean it every day. Or if we want to dig a well and get water, then we have to dig at one place constantly and deeply and not by shallow digging at several places. Each soul is potentially divine. "The goal is to manifest this divinity within by controlling nature, external and internal" (I. 257). Do this either by work or worship or psychic control or philosophy—by one or more or all of these—and be free. This is the whole of religion. Doctrines and dogmas, rituals, books, temples or forms are but secondary details. It is not confined to any form of god or different styles of prayer and it is not the rules and regulations written in religious holy books. But these are means to unfold our spiritual personality and not the goal in itself. The spirituality means manifestation of the potential divinity within us by work (karma yoga) or worship (bhakti yoga) or philosophy (gyana yoga) or psychic control (raja yoga). The characteristic of this manifestation is the mastery over the inner and external personality and the result of it is total freedom. This is what Swami Vivekananda, the patriotic and revolutionary monk of India envisaged in the human personality. He inspired and motivated hundreds and thousands of young minds in India before independence and still his thoughts are not reduced in their intensity even by an ounce to attract people from all over India and from rest of the world.

This incident took place in 1895. The place was London. Swami Vivekananda was to give a public lecture and he had come to London with Swami Saradananda. When it was time to stand up and speak, Swami Vivekananda suddenly announced that Swami Saradananda would deliver the speech instead of him. Though taken by surprise, Saradananda did an excellent job that day, and thereafter too. Swami Vivekananda had realized that all Saradananda needed was a little push to bolster his self-confidence. This incident in isolation may not say much, but we need to see it from the perspective of the leadership and management style of Swami Vivekananda. Swami ji said, "Every religion has the idea that the universe comes out of intelligence. The theory of God, taking it in its psychological significance, apart from all ideas of personality, is that intelligence is first in the order of creation, and that out of intelligence comes what we call gross matter. Modern philosophers say that intelligence is the last to come" (I. 205). Swamiji was not only an inspirational leader, but was also a very pragmatic one. He not only believed in 'Servant-based Leadership' but constantly endeavoured to empower all those around him. In dealing with his brother-disciples and followers, he evoked what is today popularly known in the management world as the 'Pygmalion Effect.' Management expert J. Sterling Livingston describes it as the effect of enabling subordinates to excel in response to the leader's expectation of them. Swami Vivekananda had a high expectation of his followers and he communicated that to them clearly, thus eliciting a high level of performance. Leaders empower their followers by believing in them, and they rise to greatness as a result. The leaders make themselves larger by enlarging others. The leader constantly aims at moving people around him from dependence to independence to the state of inter-dependence. Swami Vivekananda had chosen 'empower and facilitate' philosophy over 'command and control' long before modern management realized its potential. Trust plays an important part in the process. If the leader

does not trust his followers, he will use control instead of empowerment. Swami Vivekananda while exhorting his disciples to the highest levels of work had the fullest trust in them and their abilities. His urge to motivate people around him to aspire for higher levels of performance can be seen from this letter of his to his direct disciple Swami Shuddhananda in 1897. He writes, "...Lastly, you must remember I expect more from my children than from my brethren (his brother disciples. I want each one of my children to be a hundred times greater than I could ever be. Every one of you must be a giant—must, this is my word. Obedience, readiness, and love for the cause—if you have these three, nothing can hold you back." This also shows Swamiji's interpersonal skills and the ability to motivate and develop people. One can even say that J. Carla Nortcutt had once said, "The goal of many leaders is to get people to think more highly of the leader. The goal of a great leader is to help people to think more highly of themselves." This is perhaps the best description of Swami Vivekananda, the greatest leader of our times. Swami Vivekananda as a leader also needs to be measured and assessed from the point of view of these criteria. He not only created an extraordinary institution for growth of spirituality but also made sure that the welfare of the people would be the centerpiece of the organization's work. This is clearly evident in the motto that he gave the Ramakrishna Mission and Ramakrishna Math—'Athmano Mokshartham, Jagath Hithayacha'—where the realization of the personal self had to go hand in hand with the betterment of humanity. Swamiji speaks, "humanity travels not from error to truth, but from truth to truth" (IV. 147). Swami Vivekananda as the founder of the organization had to create the larger vision and constantly work towards building not just the organizational processes but also the people to man these organizations. He had to lay down the rules, set value systems and ensure that it was well communicated to his colleagues and team mates. "All the great systems of ethics preach absolute unselfishness as the goal. Supposing this absolute unselfishness can be reached by a man, what becomes of him? He is no more the little Mr. So-and-so; he has acquired infinite expansion. The little personality which he had before is now lost to him forever; he has become infinite, and the attainment of this infinite expansion is indeed the goal of all religions and of all moral and philosophical teachings" (I. 91). He had to inspire people to not just take on the vows of poverty and chastity but also engage themselves in meaningful social work. He was the trainer, visionary, organizational behaviour expert and the charismatic inspirer of men—all rolled in one. One also needs to understand that a leader's work cannot be measured merely from his immediate contributions. Much of the good work that he has done will be evident years later. The Institution that Swamiji has left behind is proof of the extraordinary leadership that he gave it during the years of its inception and infancy. John Maxwell, a Christian pastor and leadership expert writes, "It is very difficult task to take on the role of a leader.... There must not be a shade of jealousy or selfishness then you are a leader" (VI 284). If you develop yourself, you can experience personal success. If you develop a team, your organization can experience growth. If you develop leaders, your organization can achieve explosive growth so "a leader must be impersonal" (VIII. 429). The fact that the Ramakrishna Math & Mission achieved explosive growth long after

Swamiji's death is testimony to the fact that Swami Vivekananda helped create great leaders too. Swamiji was conscious of not making the organization too dependent on him or becoming 'Vivekananda Centric.' He never lost sight of the 'work at the centre' which was of far greater importance than either himself or his image. He never assumed any formal office for himself and made sure that from the inception, there were others to take on the mantle and lead the organization. His primary role was to mentor, guide and train these leaders. Swamiji says, "there is no allegiance possible where there is no character in the leader, and perfect purity ensures the most lasting allegiance and confidence" (VI. 284). The Ramakrishna Mission is respected for the work that it does not just in India, but all over the world. Swami Vivekananda undoubtedly has left behind an enormously positive legacy—not just an organization that any nation can be proud of, but also successive generations of positively charged up young people who share and believe in his vision and message. His loudest and greatest legacy is the millions of inspired people who dream of building a better nation and a better world.

Swami Vivekananda often related the experiences of his time and Swami Sharadananda recalls him saying once, "Even before the period of mourning was over; I had to go about in search of a job. Starving and barefooted, I wandered from office to office under the scorching midday sun with an application in hand, one or two intimate friends who sympathized with me in misfortunes accompanying me sometimes. But everywhere the door was slammed on my face. This first contact with the reality of life convinced me that unselfish sympathy was a rarity in the world—there was no place in it for the weak, the poor and the destitute" (I. 53). Swamiji's legendary concern for the poor and the downtrodden was born out of these experiences and possibly shaped his thinking and future actions. Studies in modern management have many lessons to learn from him. Many complexities arising out of diverse institutional mechanisms can be solved through his approach to the practical life. Only 'get done the job tactfully' is not going to ameliorate our quality of daily management practices in institutions but we need to think vastly through a non-material approach with philanthropic ideas as narrated by Swamiji.

Conclusion

Swamiji had a genius for arresting words and burning phrases hammered out white hot in the forge of his soul so that they transpierced thousands. It may justly be said that India's destiny was changed by him, and that this teaching re-echoed throughout humanity. And at last this perusal comes to the conclusion that Vivekananda was a management Guru whose concept of management is the need of the hour, because of its wider perspective and a universal dimension to it. Swami Vivekananda was not only a multi-faceted personality but was also far ahead of his times. Swamiji understood the problems facing humanity. Through the cause and effect method he traced the problems and provided solutions which served beyond immediate relief and farther into the future. He was a social reformer, a nationalist, and a management specialist. His concern was to elevate human kind and subsequently conquer all environments and circumstances. These unique qualities made him a leader of the supreme kind. Any block to

Swami Vivekananda's Concept of Management: An Assessment
human progress was his concern and he brought his great mind and heart in pointing out the obstructions and thereby providing solutions and showed great leadership and managerial skills.

Works Cited

- Avinashalingam, T.S., (1974), *Educational Philosophy of Swami Vivekananda* (3rd Edn.), Sri Ramakrishna Mission Vidyalaya, Coimbatore.
- Burke, M.L., (1984), *Swami Vivekananda in the West: New Discoveries*, 6, Advaita Ashrama, Calcutta.
- Dhar, S., (1975), *A Comprehensive Biography of Swami Vivekananda*, 2, Vivekananda Prakashan Kendra, Madras.
- Dutta, B.N., (1954), *Vivekananda: Patriot-Prophet*, Nababharat Publishers, Calcutta.
- Ganguly, Manmohan, (1907), *Swami Vivekananda: A Study*, Contemporary Publishers, Calcutta.
- Ganbhirananda, Swami, (1960), *The Life of Swami Vivekananda*, 2, Advaita Ashram, Calcutta.
- Gnatuk, Danil, Chuk, A.P., (1986), *Tolstoy and Vivekananda*, The Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Calcutta.
- His Eastern and Western Admirers, (1983), *Reminiscences of Swami Vivekananda*, (3rd Edn.) Advaita Ashrama, Calcutta.
- His Eastern and Western Disciples, (1989), *The Life of Swami Vivekananda*, 2, (6th Edn.), Advaita Ashramam, Calcutta.
- Shankar, Tarini, (1963), *Patriot-Saint Vivekananda*, R.K. Mission, Allahabad.
- Vivekananda, (1970), *Caste, Culture and Socialism*, Advaita Ashrama, Calcutta.
- The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, (1990), 8, Advaita Ashrama, Calcutta.
- Hornby, A.S., (2007), *Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary* (8th Edn.), Oxford University Press, New Delhi.