

ECONOMIC THOUGHT OF SWAMI VIVEKANANDA

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Abstract

Swami Vivekananda was a realist and recognized education as the primary mover for removing all the problems of society. His vision of Economics was concerned with the wholesome development of all categories of citizens in the country. His priority was the removal of poverty and uplifting the poorer of the society. He stressed the holistic development of the state and wanted all sections of the country to progress. The present study attempts to look into the economic thoughts of Swami Vivekananda.

Introduction

With the growth of civilization, saints, sages and social reformers came on the earth for the welfare of the people. Swami Vivekananda was one of such great souls. He was born on 12th January, 1863 in Kolkata in a religious Bengali family of high reputation, noted for charity, learning and strong passion for the independence. He was also known as Narendranath Datta during his pre-monastic life. His father was Vishwanath Datta and mother Bhuvaneshwari Devi. He died at the age of 39 in 1902. His spiritual preceptor was Swami Ramkrishan Paramahansa, who initiated him to the task of removing the unhappiness from the world. With this mission in his life, he wandered all over India. In 1893, he attended the Parliament of Religions which was held at Chicago in the U.S. There he made a great impression by his learned interpretations. Swami Vivekananda was born in an age when India was under the British rulers. The purpose of the British imperialism was to keep their hold over India by hook or crook disregard of the social, religious, political and economic crisis in India. He turned out to be a great patriot with burning love for India. He wanted the overall development of India. He noted and criticized the Indian

National Congress of those days because no efforts were made by it for the betterment and development of the lot of people in India. He had a vision of the unity of the country against the British imperialism. His speeches showed his strong feeling to do something for the development of his country. His teachings and lectures had a great influence on the development of Bengal in particular and India in general. He was not only a propagator of religious and philosophical ideas, but a great man having the knowledge of various fields, including Economics and politics. He aimed to reform the Hindu religion and revived its past glory. He gave the message of self respect, self confidence and love to their country and to the people of it. He emphasized the need for constant change to develop his motherland. He was in favour of the adoption of dynamic outlook that could help in changing the world. The foreign contacts and the progress achieved in different countries motivated Swami Vivekananda to achieve the same progress for India.

Swami Vivekananda conceived that India needed to progress in all fields of life-social, economic, political, and educational. Although he was not a thinker of Economics, yet his views on the concepts related with Economics could be understood from various notes and lectures delivered by him at different places and different occasions. He awakened the Indians to their miserable economic conditions. He made a deep study of western philosophy along with Indian philosophy.

Objectives of the Study

- To examine the views of Swami Vivekananda on economic philosophy.
- To take lessons from his economic philosophy in future.

Research Methodology

The present paper is based on the Content Analysis methodology. Content analysis is also called as textual analysis. It is a standard methodology in the social sciences on the subject of communication content. Content analysis is a technique for gathering and analyzing the contents of the text. The contents can be words, paragraphs, phrases, sentences, symbols, pictures, or ideas. Computer programs can be used by the researchers currently. In the present paper, we have to refer several books, articles and websites.

Swami Vivekananda on India's Economic Development

When the people wanted to get rid from the British exploitation, Swami Vivekananda wanted many steps in advance and argued for economic policies along the national lines for the

development of the country. His aim was the growth, expansion, prosperity and development of India. Swami Vivekananda realized that there is a need to develop its own system for the development of Indian economy. The various economic issues touched by him are the reduction of poverty, industrialization, social welfare, employment, trade, agriculture, education and development. The goal of Swami Vivekananda was to frame a new progressive India out of the junk of superstitions and ignorance, in which it was enveloped.

Agriculture

Agriculture has been the mainstay of Indian people since ancient times. It is the prime occupation of more than 50 per cent people of India. Swami Vivekananda also highlighted the importance of agriculture in the economy of India. He pointed out the difficulties that the Indian farmers were facing. He said that Indians must not shy off from their unique attribute of being an agrarian economy. He knew that without a strong agricultural base, it was very difficult to develop Indian industries because agriculture provided raw material to many industries. He emphasized that need for scientific methods to increase the agricultural productivity.

Food Security

Swami Vivekananda was a witness to the misery of the people. He interacted with the different sections of the society directly during his days when he wandered in different parts of the country. Later during his visits abroad he learnt about the economic and social systems of the other countries in detail. His unique experience of moving with diverse groups of people across the world, and his keen intellect provided him an opportunity to develop original ideas on different issues concerned with the lives of people. Swami Vivekananda wanted to solve the food-problem of Indians. He said that one cannot develop with an empty stomach. There must be food for all people. The minimum wants of the body must be fulfilled. Then only we can devote our mind to higher things. He considered that much of our present degradation was due to our physical weakness. In a lecture, given by him, at Madras, shows that physical weakness is the cause at least of one-third of our miseries.

Poverty

He was a great humanist. His teachings focused on the human development because he believed that the future of a country depends on its people. He was upset by the poverty, misery and suffering of the common people of the country. He wanted to check out the poverty. He was the

first religious leader in India to understand that the real cause of India's downfall was the neglect of the poor people. The immediate need was to provide food and other basic necessities of life to the hungry millions. For this they should be made self sufficient. They should be taught improved methods of agriculture, village industries, etc. As soon as he returned from USA, he established Ramakrishna Mission in Kolkata to spread the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna to remove the spiritual and physical poverty with the spread of education and health.

He said that, "the only God in whom I believe, the sum total of all, my God the wicked, my God the afflicted, my God the poor of all races".

He helped in the provision of various forms of social service, such as running hospitals, schools, colleges, hostels, rural development centers etc, and conducting immense relief and remedy work for victims of various calamities, in different parts of India and other countries.

Industrial Development and Trade

He voiced for the industrial development of the country. He realized that industrialization opens the door for the economic development of a country. He spoke extensively on industrialization, and borrowing science and technology from the developed countries. According to him the goods should be produced domestically rather than to import these. This shows his insights about trade practices, e.g., import substitution and export promotion. This would promote national income in one hand and create employment opportunity on other hand. During his journey from Japan to Chicago, his co-passenger was Sir Jamshedji Tata, and Swami Vivekananda discussed with him the need for import substitution and technical education in India. Swami Vivekananda asked him, by way of suggestion, "Why do you import matchbox from Japan and allow them to take away the major share of the money? By that you can earn only a small profit. If you manufacture it in India, you can earn more, while some people will get employment, and the money of our country will remain there".

Swami Vivekananda suggested that different types of goods should be produced by using the domestic means of production. He held that export is done to economically advanced countries; it can not only bring income, but also induce energy in domestic industries. He was confident that India can have a ready market for many Indian goods in the Western countries. He knew that there could be a great demand for Indian goods in the world market, which would become a

source of income to the country and hence a pathway to remove the poverty. One day he suggests to one of his disciples:

“If you cannot procure money, go to foreign countries, working your passage as a Lascar. Take Indian cloth, towels, bamboo-work, and other indigenous products, and peddle in the streets of Europe and America; you will find how greatly Indian products are appreciated in foreign markets even now.... Take, for example, such excellent fabric as the Varanasi-made Saris of India, the like of which are not produced anywhere else in the world. Go to America with this cloth. Have gowns made out of this fabric and sell them, and you will see how much you earn”.

He explained the role of labour classes in production of the country's wealth. According to him labourers should pay much attention on their work. They always keep in mind the principle, “work is worship”. It implies that everyman should work for work's sake. It seems that he understood the need of better quality to promote trade, so that Indian goods could compete in the foreign market.

He was not unaware about the superstitions of Indian people which were the major obstacle in the industrial development. Indians were largely traditionalists and lived on blind faith. On pointing out this he said:

“We want an enterprising spirit. Nothing is done by leading idle lives. If anyone forms a company and exports Indian goods here and into England, it will be a good trade. But they are a lazy set, enamored of child marriage and nothing else”.

Cottage and Small Scale Industries

He did not altogether ignore the importance of small scale and cottage industries. He did not unaware to look through the dangers of big enterprises usurping small ones, of profiteering, of exploitation, which come along with industrialization. In the modern trend of over-mechanization, automation, and super specialization of skills, Swami Vivekananda found that the labour class has to be in a constant threat of losing their employment. He said, “The men in factories are doing the same monotonous work, day after day, night after night, year after year, each batch of men doing one special bit of work – such as fashioning the heads of pins, or uniting

the ends of threads, or moving backwards or forwards with the loom – for a whole life. And the result is that the loss of that special job means death to them – they find no other means of living and starve.” He encouraged self employment activities at different levels and realized that India must help herself, if she wants to move on development path. He wrote to an Indian disciple:

“But you must not depend on any foreign help. Nations, like individuals, must help themselves. This is real patriotism. If a nation cannot do that, its time has not yet come. It must wait.”

Importance of Education in Human Capital Formation

He saw that, in spite of poverty, the masses cling to religion, but they had never been taught the life-giving, ennobling principles of Vedanta and how to apply them in practical life.

Thus the masses needed two kinds of knowledge: secular knowledge to improve their economic condition and spiritual knowledge to impart in them faith in themselves and strengthen their moral sense. He spread these two kinds of knowledge among the masses through education. He was in the favour of mother tongue as a medium for social or mass education. But he did not altogether ignore the learning of English and Sanskrit languages. He emphasized the need of technical education for developing the Indian industries.

Opponent of Capitalistic Greediness

Swami Vivekananda was against the unfair practices of capitalists. In fact, Capitalist class was the ruling class in Europe started to work out their authority always in the interest of their capital rather than in the interest of the non capitalist class. He showers revenge on western capitalist economy. He said that the present mercantile civilization must be died. By defining the capitalism he said, “The wealth and power of a country are in the hands of a few men, who do not work but manipulate the work of millions of human beings. By this power they can deluge the whole earth with blood. Religion and all things are under their feet; they rule and stand supreme. The western world is governed by a handful of Shylocks. All the things that you hear about constitutional government, freedom, liberty and parliaments are but jocks”.

He had shown the real face of capitalism, in a lecture delivered by him in London, which has now become mightier than ever before.

“Machines are making things cheap, making for progress and evolution, but millions are crushed, that one may become rich; while one becomes rich, thousands at the same time become poorer and poorer, and whole masses of human beings are made slaves. That way it is going on”.

Swami Vivekananda was sure that the purpose of British capitalist class was to exploit the Indian economy, i.e., to enrich England at the cost of India. He realized that India could make progress in the economic field unless British imperialism was replaced by a government controlled and run by the Indian people. He realized that their cottage and small scale industries had been destroyed by it. He also felt that British rule leading to pressure on agriculture, but the remedy for retrieving the economy lay in industrialization also. This shows his great insights about economic development of India.

Karl Marx and Swami Vivekananda

The economic ideas of Swami Vivekananda are somewhat like those of Marx. Like Karl Marx, he also wanted to establish a caste-less, state-less and class-less society, which should be based on class-consciousness and revolution by proletariats. He felt that the economy should be liberated from exploitation, cruelty and scarcity. Everyone will work according to his ability and get according to his need. He wanted to fulfill the gap between the rich and the poor. He stressed the need for the eradication of poverty, ignorance and unemployment. From his articles and speeches, it is clear that his ideas are very similar to the Marxist ideas.

Conclusion

In brief it can be said that although Swami Vivekananda was not an economist, yet he made important contributions in the economic development of India which continues to be relevant still today, as much as they were a century back. During modern era of economic globalization, the egoism of capital and the struggle for privilege are global. Stronger countries want to take out money from weaker countries. The rich nations are becoming richer, widening the gap between the rich and the poor, creating social worry. It has been observed from the Human Development Report 2005 that the richest 20 per cent of the population hold three-quarters of world income and the poorest 20 per cent hold just 1.5percent. It shows the miserable condition of masses during modern era also. In his scheme of development Swami Vivekananda also had a special place for liberation of women which is a great issue in the modern economies also in the form of women empowerment. He held that there is no chance for the welfare of the world unless the condition of women is improved. If an attention is paid to his teachings and used them in making policies regarding development, India will become prosperous and regain her high status in the world.

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