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Vivekananda

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16. How does Vivekananda present Advaita Vedanta in a concrete practical form. Discuss.

OR

Explain Vivekananda's concept of practical Vedanta.

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Ans → Vivekananda attempted to combine the lofty idealism of Advaita Vedanta with a philosophy of social practice. His aim was to revive the traditional Advaita Vedanta philosophy, for his interpretation of Advaita Vedanta he attempted to establish it as a system containing the following three factors —

- ① As a philosophical system attempting to establish the thesis that man is essentially spirit.
- ② As containing the spirit of praxis.
- ③ As containing the spirit of sociality.

for the age old upanishadic tradition, Vivekananda supported the view that the Brahman is the only reality. But while for many vedantic philosophers the Brahman was a mere abstraction for Vivekananda Brahman can not be treated to be so. He emphasised the positive aspect of Brahman. In its positive aspect Brahman is characterised by self revelation rather than by self concealment. Vivekananda argued that according to Advaita Vedanta Brahman is manifest in all human being and therefore service to humanity is the best way of unifying jiva with Brahman. Like Tilak Vivekananda

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also appears to have followed the Karmamanga for the realisation of the Brahman.

Vivekananda delivered a series of lectures which subsequently were published under the title of 'Practical Vedanta'. In these lectures he brought out his conception of practical Vedanta in the following ways -

1. True Vedanta is not speculative but practical. It does not preach turning away from the world, but demands of us service and sacrifice. If we consider the Vedanta philosophy to be absolutely impractical then it will have no value what so ever except as an intellectual gymnastics. Vivekananda did not treat Vedanta simply to be a philosophy. He treated it also as a religion. According to him as a religion it must be intensely practical. We must be able to carry it out in every part of our lives.

2. According to Vivekananda, Vedanta teaches oneness. It teaches that there is one life throughout. From this point of view the difference between theory and practice is regarded to be artificial. Vivekananda wrote, 'The ideal of religion must cover the whole field of life, they must enter into all our thoughts and more and more into practice.'

3. Summarising the teachings of the Vedanta philosophy Vivekananda pointed out that we conventionally (सामान्य) draw a distinction between the actual and the ideal. Conventio-

nally a distinction is drawn between the present life and life eternal. But practical Vedanta teaches that the artificial division between the actual and ideal should be removed and the present life should be brought closer to the life eternal.

4. The monistic tendency of the Vedanta philosophy was interpreted by Vivekananda as follows - "There is but one life, one world, one existence. Everything is that one, the difference is in degree and not in kind. The difference between our lives is not in kind." This comprehensive unity can be established through service to life in general.

5. Vivekananda pointed out that there is a strong conservative tendency in human nature. Because of this tendency we don't like to move one step forward. But we must struggle towards the ideal. We must not allow ourselves to be degraded to worldly slavery, but to be elevated to the level of God. Now this movement towards the ideal, this attempt to elevate oneself to the level of God can succeed only through practice and therefore for Vivekananda the highest philosophy is the philosophy of practical Vedanta.

6. The next point that Vivekananda stressed is the working out of the ideas of the ethics of Vedanta. According to Vivekananda realising the truths means getting beyond

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the veil of māyā. But the philosophy of Advaita Vedānta teaches that removing the veil of māyā means changing the whole vision. The world is not to be viewed as an eternal prison. It is to be viewed as an playground. When there is a total transformation of outlook then this world which formerly appeared to be hell is transformed to a heaven. 'The eyes of the bound it is a tremendous place of torment, but to the eyes of the free it is quite other wise. The one life is the universal life, heavens and all these places are here. All the gods are here, the prototypes of man.' (The complete works of Swami Vivekananda, vol-2, page 325). For this total transformation what is required is the right performance of well regulated action.

For Vivekananda's philosophy we find an attempt to synthesise the teachings of Advaita with socialism, 'the ethical doctrine - "service to man is service to humanity" appears to be one of the guiding principles of Vivekananda's philosophy of practical Vedānta.