

## Article

### A Glimpse of the Genesis of Swami Vivekananda's Economic Ideas

**Journal of Development Economics and Management Research Studies (JDMS)**  
**02(02), 1-12, October-December 2019**  
**@Center for Development Economic Studies (CDES)**  
**Reprints and permissions**  
<http://www.cdes.org.in/>  
<http://www.cdes.org.in/current-issue/>

Dr. (Mrs) K Kamar Jahan<sup>1</sup>

#### ABSTRACT

*The ideas and contribution of Swami Vivekananda on economy appealed to the author of the present paper to explore his vision of Economics and its relevance to the present day Indian situation. India is a multicultural country with differing social identities formed from varying cultural norms, religio-politics, linguistic differences, and caste-based segregation. As a great visionary, his intimate knowledge of the Indian situation, wide experience across different countries and keen intellect influenced him to develop new insights on economics. Therefore the ideals of Swami Vivekananda to economic development is highlighted and acknowledged in the present paper.*

**Key words:** Economic ideas, Education, Poverty, Material prosperity, Agriculture, Industrialisation,

#### **Introduction**

Economic ideas have been there since time immemorial tracing out the story of trials and tribulations of human beings in undertaking much effort to fulfill their needs. The history of economic thought provides the historical survey of the origin and development of economic ideas governing individual actions and policy measures as solutions to the existing crisis in the society. Thus, economic thinking is the heritage of man in a society. In this context, the ideas and contribution of Swami Vivekananda on economy appealed to the author of the present paper to explore his vision of Economics and its relevance to the present day Indian situation.

Born as Narendranath Dutta on 12<sup>th</sup> January 1863 at Kolkata, Swami Vivekananda was a great Indian saint. He was a figure with “high thinking and simple living”. He was a philosopher, and also a devout personality with great principles. His eminent philosophical works comprise of “Modern Vedanta” and “Raj Yoga”. He was an initiator of Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission. He spent his whole life in the dispersion of the values embedded in the great Indian culture. He played a prominent role in ending India’s cultural remoteness from the rest of the world. He had a rare clarity on diverse aspects of human life. As a great visionary, his intimate knowledge of the Indian situation, wide experience across different countries and keen intellect influenced him to develop new insights on economics.

---

<sup>1</sup> Deputy Controller of Examinations, Vivekanandha College of Arts & Sciences for Women, (Autonomous), Trichengode, Tamilnadu, India.

### **Challenges of Indian economy**

India is one of the few countries in the world where the potential trend in growth rate is still quite high. The 72 years of Independence have seen many changes in the social-economic and political landscape of India. Despite rapid economic growth during Post-Independence period, unemployment in India is still an issue in both rural and urban areas<sup>1</sup>. India's gross domestic product (GDP) growth is seen dipping to a seven-year low of one (1.1) per cent in the current fiscal 2019-20 (FY20), mainly due to slower demand growth, weak investment, credit issues, currency fluctuations, and rising inflation, as per the data released by the International Monetary Fund (IMF)<sup>2</sup>.

The Indian economy still faces various other problems and challenges, such as corruption, lack of infrastructure, poverty in rural areas etc. Since the early 1950s, the Indian government has initiated various schemes to help the poor but such initiatives, however, did little to eliminate or reduce poverty in the country between 1950 and 1980<sup>3</sup>. With rural distress deepening across India and private consumption growing anemically, calls for ramping up a many programmes are growing louder as critics have labeled them as wasteful and ineffective efforts. For example, MGNREGS can of course provide income security to its beneficiaries, but its overall impact on the rural economy is limited. Regarding its wage impact, for instance, one 2015 study estimated that the rural wages have been nearly doubled above MGNREGS wages over the last decade. Therefore, the MGNREGS wages are not only significantly below rural wages, but are also below the minimum wage in 23 states.<sup>4</sup>

Furthermore, there are several other major social issues that impair the reputation of the country globally. India is a multicultural country with differing social identities formed from varying cultural norms, religio-politics, linguistic differences, and **caste**-based segregation. People belonging to discriminated caste groups, especially **Dalits**, continue to face social isolation, economic distress, and various other forms of backwardness socially inflicted on them. From the increasing poverty, to the corruption at an all-time high, the increasing violence against women across the nation, the incidents of terrorism that rock some or the other city, and the rising prices of basic items, are some of the scariest facts of this fast-growing economy.

Swamiji, a leading figure and a great and selfless leader was very keen on wholesome development of all categories of the population living in the country. His priority was the removal of poverty at the first instance followed by uplifting the weaker sections particularly women and downtrodden in the society. He stressed the holistic development of the individual and the nation as well. He underlined that education and basic facilities be provided to all people in the country. He wanted all sections of the country to progress indicating his care for equality in the distribution of income opportunities. He strongly recommended the adoption of developed methods of agriculture, village industries, adoption of science and technology and material prosperity with spirituality which seems to match the need of the society even today.

### **Importance of the Study**

Vivekananda's ideals are the tools that can be used to remove all darkness. His views on understanding of religion, principle of morality and ethics, concept of East-West, contribution to

Hinduism are still relevant in enlightening the present community. His most unique contribution to the creation of new India was to awaken the sleeping minds of Indians to their duty to the society in general and service to the downtrodden masses in particular. The motto “for one’s own salvation and for the welfare of the world” and the ideal of service to man as service to God were outlined by Swami Vivekananda. At present, unselfish men with sharp intellect and marvelous technical knowledge are the need of the hour to achieve economic prosperity of the country as a whole. Following the pathways of Swami Vivekananda to achieve material prosperity with spirituality would gain the wholesome development of the country which is often referred to inclusive growth by our economists in the recent periods. Therefore the ideals of Swami Vivekananda to economic development is highlighted and acknowledged in the present paper.

Swamiji was an inspiration for the Youth of India. Through his teachings he wanted to fill the young brains with the powers of self-realization, character formation, to recognize inner strengths, service to others, an optimistic outlook, tireless efforts and a lot more. Swami Vivekananda’s guidance helped to generate new consciousness and enthusiasm amongst the youth. Swamiji’s Jayanti i.e. birth anniversary is celebrated as the ‘International Youth Day’

He extensively toured all over India, and it was in this context that Vivekananda grasped the crux of the problem of poverty in India. He was very upset when he saw the overwhelming poverty and backwardness of the masses in the country. He boldly pointed out that the real cause of India’s downfall was the neglect of the masses in the nation. He further recommended that immediate actions be taken by the leaders of the nation to fulfill the food and other basic necessities of life to the hungry millions. He further made suggestion that in order to achieve the self sufficiency in food production the people should be taught improved methods of agriculture, village industries, etc.

Due to persistent oppression the downtrodden and weaker section of the society had lost faith in their capacity to improve their lot. So first infuse self confidence in them through life-supporting mantras and inspiring messages. Swamiji found this message in the principle of the Atman, the doctrine of the potential divinity of the soul, taught in Vedanta, the ancient system of religious philosophy of India. He saw that, in spite of poverty, the masses clung to religion, but they had never been taught the life-supporting, dignifying principles of Vedanta and its application in practical life. Thus the masses needed two kinds of knowledge: secular knowledge to improve their economic condition and spiritual knowledge to infuse in them faith in themselves and strengthen their moral sense. He decided to spread these two kinds of knowledge among the masses through education.<sup>5</sup>

## **Education**

Swami Vivekananda believed that education may lead to character formation. He emphasized that the Education should be such that it create ‘human’ and character in one. He also added that the education not only create ‘human’ with good character but also inculcate good thoughts. If you have good thoughts and try to inculcate them in you, your education is said to the best. But unfortunately today’s reality is education has completely failed in creating ‘human’ rather has created terrible defects in the innocent kids making the good things become ineffective and inappropriate. He further noted that the education not creating ‘human’ is

completely a negative education. Such negative education or education that teaches only to condemn our culture is worse than death. He held the view that the children want that education by which character is formed, strength of mind is increased, the intellect is expanded and self-reliance is ensured. Along with spiritual progress, materialistic and worldly progress in an individual was equally important in practice.

Education is the manifestation of the perfection already in man.

- ♣ We want that education by which character is formed, strength of mind is increased, the intellect is Education is the manifestation of the perfection already in man.
- ♣ We want that education by which character is formed, strength of mind is increased, the intellect is.

### **Views on Religion**

Swamiji did not criticise any religion. He did not degrade any religion. He only wiped the dirt that had accumulated on the Hindu Dharma owing to its ill-treatment and affronts at the hands of its invaders. According to him, any social movement, even politics must be done without hampering religion. In fact the best social movements can only come along with religion. He suggested gradually shaping India strong in these fields, in religion, actualising the great spiritual precepts in life, and then India would rise not only in philosophy but the power of the spirit would manifest itself even in socio-economic spheres.

### **Views on Poverty**

Swami Vivekananda acquired a thorough knowledge of the Indian economic situation and issues in existence as he travelled extensively covering different parts of the country. His experiences and interactions with people at different levels in the foreign countries provided him an opportunity to understand and compare the economic and social systems of our country with that of other countries of the world. Swamiji recognized the fact that under British rule, India's wealth and the best resources of the country were largely exported by the foreigners. The unrestricted exports of merchandise and economic exploitation by the British were the causes of India's poverty.

Swamiji's ideas of poverty are closely interlinked with his views on religion and philosophy. To him India was a vibrant and complex whole, and therefore improving its economic conditions is a very crucial operational effort. Swamiji insisted on removing poverty is a social as well as a religious exercise. He says one should provide help to the poor and the needy with all humility. Removing the poverty of the masses in the country is indeed a great task with a little weight of spiritual dimension. Even he observed that the poor in India had been carrying silently its spiritual legacy. However, in one of his Chicago lectures, Swamiji declared that bread and not religion was the crying need of India.

### **Industrialization**

Swami Vivekananda was pragmatic enough to understand that industrialisation was necessary for removing poverty. Swami Ashokananda cited from the writings of Swami Vivekananda that while indigenous industries and Indian cultural heritage were important, industrialisation was also necessary for the country to progress. Swamiji found that the small-scale industrial activities paralleled with the modern system being apparent in the country. He also found labor legislations to ameliorate the conditions of workers were meager. He held the

opinion that the West pattern can be followed in the industrial reorganization. In other words, Swamiji was in favor of introducing the Western industrial methods in India.<sup>13</sup> In his words, “You must learn the power of organization of the Europeans. The Hindus have to learn a little bit of materialism from the West and teach them a little bit of spirituality. We have, perhaps, to gain a little in material knowledge, in the power of organization, in the ability to handle powers, organizing powers, in bringing the best results out of the smallest of causes. This perhaps to a certain extent we may learn from the West... Yet, perhaps, some sort of materialism, toned down to our own requirements, would be a blessing to many of our brothers who are not yet ripe for the highest truths.”

### **Agriculture**

As a true visionary, Swami Vivekananda emphasized the vital role of agriculture in the economic development of the country. He found that Indians are half heartedly recognized themselves their unique characteristic of being an agrarian economy.<sup>6</sup> He insisted that people dependent on agriculture as their main occupation and for whom the main source of income is agriculture should adopt modern scientific practices to improve agricultural production. In this context, his emphasis on agriculture remains agreeable even today, as about 50 per cent of the population still depends on agriculture and rural-based activities. Unfortunately the neglect of agriculture in the last few decades has resulted in increase of farmer suicides and the youth focused on higher studies in large scale are leaving farming activities. This further has led the agrarian economy as a whole under threat. Though India has inherent strengths in agriculture unlike other countries the future of the country has become questionable with respect to food production and food supply.

### **Father of Modern Materialism**

Swami Vivekananda argued that India with a long history of prosperity and superior achievements became poor due to European domination. The agricultural, industrial and business sectors were destroyed. Education was denied to the larger sections of the society. The value based systems that governed the society and economy since the ancient times suffered severe damages. Besides these negativities the fact which made Samiji to worry about was when he saw the western countries getting rich with the help of Indian resources. The people of foreign countries import Indian raw goods, manufacture various commodities and become spectacular in the global map. He wanted to blend economic development with spiritual pursuits.<sup>7</sup> Swamiji’s thoughts for the Indian economy encompasses different areas that are crucial to the functioning of the economic system. He was the only spiritual monk who emphasized the need for material progress of the society. Hence he was called as ‘father of modern materialism.’<sup>8</sup>.

### **Conclusion**

Swami Vivekananda was a great Indian saint. He was a figure with “high thinking and simple living”. As a great visionary, his intimate knowledge of the Indian situation, wide experience across different countries and keen intellect influenced him to develop new insights on economics. Swamiji, a leading figure and a great and selfless leader, was very keen on

wholesome development of all categories of the population living in the country. He was the only spiritual monk who emphasized the need for material progress of the society. If his economic ideas are paid a little attention by the leaders and be focused on his views pertaining to education and spirituality among youth our nation may really become prosperous and secure high reputation in the world,

### **References:**

1. [www.economicshelp.org › india-2 › problems-Indian-economy](http://www.economicshelp.org/india-2/problems-Indian-economy).
2. Chitranjan Kumar: "Slowdown Blues: India is falling behind emerging economies, suggests IMF report", Business Today, New Delhi, January 20, 2020.
3. "India's Urban Poverty Agenda: Understanding the Poor in Cities and Formulating Appropriate Anti-Poverty Actions" (PDF). Goa, India. 9–21 January 2000.
4. <https://www.livemint.com/news/india/is-mgnregs-the-answer-to-the-rural-slowdown-11579685377701.html>
5. <http://www.belurmath.org/swamivivekananda.htm>
6. Swami Gambirananda as quoted in Ghosh, Sarup Prasad, Swami Vivekananda's Economic Thought and in Modern International Perspective: India as a Case Study, The Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Kolkatta, 2010, p.53.
7. Ajay Bhardwaj: International Journal of Science and Consciousness (IJSC): a Bio-Psycho-Spiritual approach Published by the Research Foundation for Science & Consciousness, Uttarakhand, India August 2016 | Vol. 2 | No. 3 | Pages 21-26 eISSN: 2455-2038 An international, refereed, quarterly, open access, multidisciplinary, e-journal.
8. <http://www.organiser.org/Encyc/2013/1/19/Swami-Vivekananda-s-approach-to-Indian-economy>.
9. Bisharia, L. and P. Bisharia, Population (1757-1947) in D. Kumar (ed.). The Cambridge Economic History of India, Orient Longman, New Delhi, 1982, Vol. 2, p. 519,488.

\*\*\*