

SOLIVING PROBLEMS: THE VIVEKANANDA WAY

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SOLVING PROBLEMS

Every society has some problems and some problems are common to all societies. While every society attempts to solve its existing problems, new problems arise. There is thus always a residual problem in every society. There are two ways of tackling problems—one is curative and the other preventive. Though prevention is always better than cure, in case of problems in society, which arise out of very complex factors, prevention is very difficult, and being beset with numerous problems most societies spend more energy in curative methods only. Social institutions which grow in every society through long periods of time are meant for prevention of problems in society, while the political state takes care of curing problems which arise and remain, having bypassed the preventive shield. But social institutions have weakened in all societies in a dwindling world due to various reasons including free flow of diverging ideas even to quarters where they do not suit the condition. Thus social institutions not operating properly, the preventive method is relegated to an insignificant position and problems are tackled when they are already there mainly by the political method through the state. Naturally problems are viewed and tackled in different ways in different states. Not only that, any political change in any society brings about a change in the manner of viewing and tackling the problems, as different political groups are wedded to different ideologies. Moreover, running a state machinery to manage the various affairs of a society is a tough job which allows little time to the men in the machinery to delve deep into the problems arising out of complex factors of which the basic human factors are most difficult to discern and most important for finding a remedy for a radical cure. Thus the tackling of problems by the political way touches the small outward portions of icebergs of the whole problems. Political groups which have to retain their power by the sheer weight of majority have naturally to give stress on quantity (number) and quality loses its value that it deserves. But in quality is the seed of problems as well as that of the remedy. Here lies the meeting point of the curative and the preventive methods. For, if one quality gives rise to a problem another quality can supply the remedy and a qualitative change of the substratum of the qualities can afford a method of radical cure of problems, which, looked the other way, is really a fool-proof preventive method. For instance self-interest (which is a polished name for selfishness) is a very natural quality of every creature including man giving it the will to preserve itself and to acquire things to enjoy them which, though unavoidable to some extent, is the root of many many grave problems and its

antidote is unselfishness which may be cultivated but cannot be infused by law or any outside pressure.

Problems in society may be of various kinds—economic, social, political, racial, linguistic, communal, educational, moral, etc. But where in society are the roots of the problems to be found? What constitutes society after all? Is it the pastures, meadows, villages cities, roads, buildings, or different institutions, the statures, the legislatures, the police, the governments, or the man living in society, mutually cooperating, using all natural and man-made material facilities and institutions developed for mutual benefit ultimately for the purpose of progress, development, and unfoldment of the potentialities of man who feels such an urge in his bosom? Obviously man is at the centre. For him everything else is there. He struggles on and on, commits mistakes and learns from experience, and continues the struggle to make the best of him. The arena of this continuing struggle the bring forth the best in him is society where he acts, and reacts to various forces, pushes and pulls, the strings being ultimately controlled by man, though apparently they operate through various institutions, giving a wrong impression that man has no control over the forces in the society in which he is placed.

Thus in man alone roots of any problem of society have to be found –be it an economic, social, political, racial, linguistic, communal, educational, or moral problem. If the problem is to be tackled, man has to be tackled ultimately. There is no way of tackling society or its problems outside of man.

One important point needs to be taken note of here. Admitting that ultimately man will have to be tackled for the solution of any problem, who will tackle man? The government, the institutions, the society in general? But if we examine carefully we shall see that behind any such body—government, institutions or society –is the vision, discrimination, and will of man. So it is a question of man tackling man properly. And if we go a little deeper we find that man is ultimately to tackle himself.

Now, what is meant by tackling man? Surely not his body, but his mind, which is the substratum of the qualities which are responsible for all problems and their solution or prevention of rising of problems. Thus his mind is to be so chastened that it is capable of bringing the current and expression of will under its control so that they become fruitful. That implies properly tackling the mind to educate it. Thus ultimately education is the instrument to tackle problems for solution.

If we accept the proposition that education or training the mind properly is the ultimate method of tackling problems for solution, we have to admit that curative methods of tackling problems are not of much avail. They may suppress evils to some extent and at best can lessen the corroding effects of the problems on society. We have already observed the factors limiting the efficacy of such methods and not being able to pin much faith in this way of tackling problems, we have to consider in more details the other, viz. the preventive method of solving problems through the training of the mind of man.

Now the question, can all minds be trained? Yes, but once a mind has grown its propensities and their ruts and grooves have become deep enough, it is very difficult to change them, though that is not impossible. So efforts to train and change the behaviour patterns of the sufficiently grown ups will not be of much avail. They may be left to

themselves to take care of their minds for their own peace and may be allowed to pass out of the scene in due course. But it is most important to see that young minds are so tackled, trained, and moulded from the earliest period that they avoid qualities giving rise to problems and are equipped with the qualities which they can employ in solving residual problems in society more efficiently with wider and more penetrating vision, sharper discrimination, and stronger will. And we have already observed that man is ultimately to tackle man and the ones who would tackle men in the future society are the young of today. So the young must realize the necessity of making themselves fit to tackle problems and in the process prevent newer problems from arising. It should naturally be the serious business of others to help the young make themselves properly.

This is exactly the field in which the Mahamandal has chosen to work. Thus the most urgent work is the proper training of the youths. The training should be so planned that it will develop the youths in all directions. A total man out of every youth should be the aim. Thus today we talk of total education which will take care of head and heart and hand of the youth. But though long after Swami Vivekananda's propounding that idea of total education we have come to realize this need, it is yet a far cry in the educational system still prevailing in our country. So the plan has to be taken up by others even outside the educational institutions, where even now only the head is taken care of. That also for cramming it with information of various sorts without ensuring assimilation of ideas for formation of character. A man who does not have the ability to think properly, the capacity to feel sympathetically, and the efficiency to work accordingly by using his head, heart, and hand suitably has not grown totally. A man who has developed in these three directions is truly educated. Otherwise he remains on the level of beasts, being satisfied with his food, sleep, and procreative urges, desires for satisfying the senses, and in attempting to acquire all sorts of objects for his enjoyment and pleasure, even depriving and denying others of their need being a slave of his shameless selfishness, without any concern for others.

Here is the root of all problems. And the remedy is in proper education which tilts the trend. Today what we are doing is, we are not taking care of proper education, upbringing of our children and they are growing as uncared for shrubs and thickets and the common man in society is often scratched by their thorns.

Often all of a sudden we wake up to problems in society and in a hurry think out a plan, each in his own way, and try to remove the problems through various ways often in a big and apparently organized manner, without any scruples about any method, and take good care of spectacular publicity to what we have been doing. The common man becomes expectant of some good result and eagerly waits for the news that the goods have been delivered. But after some time everything fizzles out and we go back to slumber. This has happened many times and will happen again and again until we know where to start.

We have to start from the root. We have to water and nourish the roots and when the plant grows up we shall get the fruits. We have to take care of the young, educate them properly and when they take upon themselves the task of running the social life in all its aspects, then only the problems will be solved, and not before that. Few will have

patience to wait to see this, not anxious to cater something which has a good market, but a remedy which though not so tasty, will cure the disease.

Man-making education is to be spread—to be spread everywhere, to be taken to every home. It must reach every child of our motherland. Every youth must be a participant in this man-making movement. No so-called religion, no so-called social service, no so-called social reform, no agitation for big changes, no tussle for seats in local bodies or assemblies or parliament, no movement for changes in educational system even. Why? None will succeed unless we have men first. Make men, be men, have men. Everything will follow. All changes will come, problems will be controlled. Don't blame or criticize those who believe in curative methods. Let them fight hard. Let them work sincerely to solve the problems. You proceed along your own way. Do not waste time to convince others. If you are convinced, start working. Once Swami Vivekananda said, Be good and do good. This is religion. Can you take up this religion? If the youths take up this religion the world will be better. The short-sighted selfish man, who has no love for others and hypocrites will not see this simple truth. They will mock at you and even try to persecute you, for you are trying to do good to yourself and to your society. Alas! That is the nature of the selfish man. The selfish man will say, 'The world is for me.' You will say, 'I am for the world.' He will say, 'The weak shall be sacrificed for the strong.' You will suggest, 'The strong shall sacrifice themselves for the weak.' The selfish man will say, 'Might is right.' You will patiently hold, 'Righteousness is real might.' This is the way of becoming good. This is the way of helping others to be good. This goodness will make you strong. Your character will be your shield.

Do we need huge sums of money for this man-making education? Do we need big buildings to house schools for the purpose? Nothing. Do you love your country? Do you feel for the suffering of the millions of your countrymen? Do you long for their amelioration? Do you believe, it can be done only if you are a better man who would develop his head, heart, and hand? Do you see that others should also develop likewise? Then become man and help others to become men. You can do it while doing your normal duties. Doing anything else is dissipation of energy. Many distractions and allurements will come. Can you resist them? Can you stick to your policy? For, the greatest sacrifice that you can do now is to stop frittering away your energy in anything else other than building your character, to become a man totally developed in head, heart, and hand. Strengthen your brawn, sharpen your brain, and broaden your heart.

Mahamandal centres are places in towns and villages—any room or shed or shade of a tree or a play ground where youths meet. They take exercise to keep the body strong and healthy; study and discuss to sharpen their intellect and gather knowledge; through the study of the life and teachings of Swami Vivekananda of an oceanic heart and by actually emulating his exhortations on serving humanity they make efforts to expand their heart. How practical this is, none will believe unless he has gone through the process and has been astonished to mark his own heart expanding. Mental concentration and prayer are two invaluable aids for any human effort. They practice these also. These are their regular tasks. Similar but simpler exercises for children are also provided. To help them understand the whole scheme, details of the methods of self-improvement and character-building and the underlying principles, they are given the opportunity to

attend youth training camps which are held often at various levels from local to All-India. Follow-up study points to very encouraging results of improvement of character-qualities of individuals. Group activity, living together, mixing with youths from different parts of the country give them toleration, cooperative spirit, sense of identity with all and national integrity. Everything together makes them better citizens – dutiful, patriotic, unselfish, sacrificing – with humanistic disposition, spirit of service, and broader outlook.

It needs a lot of courage and a robust optimism to visualize that tireless efforts in this line will produce in the long run a countable number of youths of character who gradually will fill up vacancies in educational institutions, hospitals, services, farms, offices, business houses, assemblies, parliaments, etc. to sweep off the filth in all spheres of life. The Mahamandal does not want to start educational institutions, hospitals, factories, etc, or to enter into politics. All these are there in plenty. But all such institutions are suffering for dearth of men. The Mahamandal will be satisfied if it could successfully do the thankless job of making men of character and supplying them to all fields, not to gain control over them or to gain power through politics, but as without this the ultimate problem of the society cannot be solved. This is the meaning of Swamiji's saying, 'And therefore, make men first.' We have not so far properly heeded to Swamiji's suggestion. But in this suggestion lies the seed of a revolutionary change. Without trying to avoid Swamiji, by sticking the label of 'The Hindu Monk' on his person, lest our selfish dreams of pandering to lust for power and possessions vanish, let us work upon this plan and spread this man-making movement throughout the length and breadth of the country.

HOPE LIES IN VALUES

Man is not merely a creature of history, he also contributes to the making of history. This is a historical fact, which we must not overlook. We must get rid of the bias for history giving it an unbridled sway denigrating man about his capacity to create history. In fact man has not risen to the true stature of man so long as he remains a creature of history. When he acquires true manhood he is to create history. History itself cannot have any ill motive to subdue man, as it operates unconsciously according to the interactions of forces in society peopled by sentient human beings, who have the options of remaining dumb creatures of history or becoming its creator. Man in his role of creating history makes progress towards the fulfillment of his life and that way history of man has a definite direction of movement from lesser fulfillment to greater fulfillment of human life.

Man moves on according to his will, which he derives from the values that he upholds. Values are created by man and treasured in his culture, which passes on from generation to generation. Values are created according to the philosophy of life of a people. And unless a philosophy is comprehensive enough to have the total man in its view, it cannot give him the right values, and the will that flows from them, to lead him to the greatest fulfillment of his life. A comprehensive philosophy of man must take a full

view of man in its totality, and therefore must take into account all the dimensions of his personality. And such a complete study of man, his whole nature, in its depths gives rise to true human values. Values trying to derive their sanctity from any external source, external nature, or matter are not values of life, which can lead man in his life's journey towards its natural fulfilment.

'A civilization without a philosophy is like a temple without the holy of holies,' said Hegel. So long as man remains engrossed grappling with his problems of survival trying to achieve a measure of stability and security on the material plane, he has no time to advance on the plane of mind and thought, to make philosophical speculation, asking questions about the nature of the universe and the meaning of human existence. But man must delve deep into the mystery of nature—external and internal—to have a philosophy of life. Only when he comprehends nature in its totality, both external and internal nature, he can have a right philosophy, which can give him the right values of life to be pursued. While on the material plane, his aim might be mere survival, numerical increase, 'Increased control over his environment,' 'creation, possession, and enjoyment of material wealth and the search for organic satisfactions,' living a mere sensate life, where man is a mere body, a bundle of senses and uncontrolled emotions. His attempt to philosophize while on this plane of living, his dominant concern being matter and his senses and their satisfaction, he is erroneously led to a philosophy of 'materialism'. This may be called, to say the least, a premature philosophy, for, at this stage man has not probed deep enough into the depth of nature outside or his own inner depth. As held long by our traditional thought and in the light of modern knowledge of biology, pursuing the course of evolution, 'man's most comprehensive aim' is 'greater fulfillment—the fuller realization of more possibilities by the species collectively and more of its component members individually.' This aim cannot be provided by materialism. R.A. Millikan, a renowned scientist, says, 'To me a philosophy of materialism is the height of unintelligence.' Modern thinkers, 'while accepting "matter" as a useful and convenient concept for the scientific investigation of the world of experience, consider "materialism" an unscientific intruder, a crude dogma leading to the evil of the mechanization of man and the destruction of the beauty and worth of his personality. A philosophy which does not view man in his totality, does not take note of all the dimensions of his personality, if it is lived up to long enough, will sp his aim of greater fulfillment, nip his possibilities, stunt and cripple him. Worth noting is the observation of Thomas Huxley : 'But the man of science, who forgetting the limits of philosophical inquiry, slides from these formulae and symbols into what is commonly understood by materialism seems to me to place himself on a level with the mathematician who should mistake the x's and y's with which he works his problems, for real entities, and with this further disadvantage, as compared with the mathematician, that the blunders of the latter are of no practical consequence, while the error of systematic materialism may paralyse the energies and destroy the beauty of a life.'

It is wrong to search for values in matter with an eye to organic and mundane satisfactions alone. They are very low in the scale of values for human life. The personality of man has many dimensions—some obvious and some somewhat obscure. Apart from the discerning observation of modern biology about the trend of human

evolution, modern psychology delving deep in the psyche of man has recognized a new dimension of the human personality which it can only call 'the spiritual dimension of the human personality.' This is the essence of the true nature of man. From this depth of the essence of the nature of man proceeds the higher values of human life giving him the intimations of his greater fulfillment, the premonitions of his possibilities. A spiritual philosophy does not ask man to scorn matter, to hold matter with contempt, to consider it beneath notice, but asks him to master it with the power of his spirit and using his brain through science and technology as tools. It only cautions man not to fall a prey to a 'premature' philosophy of materialism, which asks man to halt at door of matter and be its servant. He must have material and organic satisfactions to the extent needed but not become intoxicated and consumed by its lure. On the material basis of his culture man must build the superstructure of his mental culture and become fully grown as human beings manifesting his potentialities and gradually achieving a greater fulfillment.

From the spiritual essence of the nature of man must proceed his values which will strengthen him morally in the context of his social relationships and give him enlightenment in inner life. Fostering the spiritual essence of the nature of man can only give him the ethical values of concern for other, social feeling, unselfishness, spirit of sacrifice, and attitude of service. Man can thus alone be adorned with social virtues and graces, fortitude and all-engulfing love. The man who is guided by a material philosophy is guided by self-interest lone and strives by all means to satisfy his interests alone without scruples against interests of other. Unrestricted outturn in large numbers of such men in society is the source of all social maladies. In a check on this and a positive action to help more men to foster the spiritual aspect of this personality, so that they can have the will to pursue higher values of life and acquire virtues and graces of good citizenship, lies hope for man's progress. That is why Swami Vivekananda gave a call to 'deluge the land with spiritual ideals before all else.' Thus he reminded men; 'Ye are not matter ye are not bodies; matter is your servant, not you the servant of matter.'

Let us heed the warnings of a philosopher and a scientist. Bertrand Russell says: 'Whatever else may be mechanical, values are not, and this is something which no political philosopher must forget.'

Sir Julian Huxley, the modern biologist, observes : 'Only in and through man can any further major advance be achieved—though equally he may inflict damage or distortion on the process, including his own evolving self.'