

## CHAPTER - 1

# INTRODUCTION

Narendranath Datta also popularly known as Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902) is a cyclonic Hindu monk of 19<sup>th</sup> century who not only revolutionised Hindu religion but also has a deep impact on each and every corner of Indian society. Many great men like Aurobindo, Subhash Chandra Bose, Mahatma Gandhi and Jamsedji Tata were influenced by Swamiji. Many scholars consider him as a thunderbolt of Hinduism (Sharma, 2003) who reshaped Hinduism in the west. Observing Vivekananda's Contribution to Hinduism, Bal Gangadhar Tilak Said, "It is an undisputed fact that it was Swami Vivekananda who first held aloft the banner of Hinduism as a challenge against the material science of the West. It was Swami Vivekananda who first took on his shoulders this stupendous task of establishing the glory of Hinduism in different countries across the borders. And he, with his erudition, oratorical power, enthusiasm, and inner force, laid that work upon a solid foundation. Twelve centuries ago Shankara was the only great personality who not only spoke of the purity of our religion... but also brought all this into action. Swami Vivekananda is a person of that stature." Vivekananda always believed in the Supremacy of The Vedas and its time.

For him, a Vedantin can follow the path of Truth. Though outwardly it is a religious-spiritual concept but it also carries the socio-political notion of platonic justice. Vivekananda has deep respect for woman. He considered woman as the incarnation of THE SHAKTI which is the cosmological creative force. He believed woman should treat equally like man in each and every aspect of life. According to him, "The best thermometer to the progress of a nation is its treatment of its women." He was more concern about the

degradation of woman status in modern India. He wanted to rejuvenate the woman position which they got in pre Vedic and Vedic ages. Following Manu's Mahabakya, "Yatrnaryastopojyantay, ramantaytatrdevta" (3/56), Vivekananda always advised society to treat woman like Sita, Sabitri, Damayanti. He saw woman as the manifestation of The God. He criticised male supremacy and said, 'If you do not allow one to become a lion, he will become a fox. Women are a power, only now it is more evil because man oppresses woman; she is the fox, but when she is no longer oppressed, she will be the lion (CW vol.7, p.22)'

### **1.1. Research Problem**

"Sisters and Brothers of America..." was the first line, uttered by the Swami Vivekananda at the Parliament of the World's Religions (1893). It itself shows Vivekananda's priority to Respect the womanhood. On the one hand, Swami Vivekananda astonished as well as praised the position of women in the west and on the other hand, he worried to see the position of Indian women. He always gave emphasis to the upliftment of woman status through modern secular education. Therefore, He under his guidance gave responsibilities to Sister Nivedita to promote modern education among Indian woman. He also considered woman as 'Bramhavadin' who has capacity to grow herself simultaneously in modern education and spiritualism. For Vivekananda, woman's purity is more important than her intellect. Here the problem is occurred between those who believed Vivekananda is the modern time philosopher, social reformer and religious preacher who freed Hinduism from its traditional evil and accepted woman as equal with man in both religious and secular activities and those who criticised him as a symbol of 'manliness and effeminacy'(Sen)<sup>1</sup>. Feminist critic criticised him that he believed that woman is only

performed her duty as a subordinate to the man. All of his examples like Sita, Sabitri are the ideals of a devoted wife rather than an identity of her 'OWN'. All glorified images of Woman which was depicted in Vivekananda's work are always revolved around any Man (e.g Sita-Rama). Therefore there is a doubt occurred in researcher's mind on Vivekananda's parameter to observe women status both from philosophical and empirical point of view.

## **1.2. Research Question**

1. Is there any contradiction exist between Vivekananda's and Vedantic idea?

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2. Does Vivekananda is able to purify Hindu religion from its past problems?

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3. Does he is free from masculinity in toto?

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4. Does his idea of woman is totally independent and free from any kind of cultural and religious biasness?

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5. Does his notion of Woman is limited and bounded with socio-cultural norms?

## **1.3. Objectives**

The objective of this research is to study Vivekananda's work critically and re-examine the position of woman. Also, this research will be helpful to solve the long philosophical debate which exists between the cultural juggernaut and the reactive feminist.

## **1.4. Hypothesis**

The major hypothesis of this research is that Vivekananda is the proponent of Neo-Hinduism which is free from traditional drawbacks and gender blindness .The minor hypothesis of my research is that Vivekananda represents 'Soft Masculinism'.

## 1.5. Review of the Literature

Feminist always criticised religion as a platform that encouraged masculinity. According to **Molina,C** “Institutions such as the military, organized sports and religion are examples of androcentric structures that direct power and privilege towards men and sustain the subordination of women in their own unique way, thereby reproducing masculinity as the dominant position in a gendered institutional setting and the larger social structure.”

**Krondorfer and Hunt** (2012) in their article described the messages derived from religious leaders, texts and practices are largely restrictive, heteronormative and rationalize gender inequalities between men and women.

**Daly (1985), Woodhead (2001) and Sullins(2006)** respectively mentioned that religious ideologies are the source of religio-patriarchal oppression.

**Hunt (2012)** mentioned male dominance in religion is considered as Godly Trait. Religion plays a vital role in shaping cultural, social, economic, and political norms in many parts of the world. Similarly, gender roles and the status of women and men in society are deeply tied to the manner in which religious texts have been interpreted for centuries by those in positions of authority—positions held predominantly by men. This was more emphatically mentioned in the famous theologian Mary Daly’s sentence, “If God is male, then the male is God” (1973, p. 19),.

**Mill, James** the author of History of British India had studied the above phenomena in Indian context and said, ‘nothing can exceed the habitual contempt which the Hindus entertain for their women...They are held, accordingly, in extreme degradation also’. The

above statements show that there is a fundamental problem lies with the relation between woman and religion in general and woman and Hinduism in particular.

This problem naturally put a bigger question on Swami Vivekananda .Because some scholars believed that Swamiji played significant role on the rejuvenation of Hinduism. **Sharma, J** in his book *Hindutva: Exploring the Idea of Hindu Nationalism* mentioned, ‘A single event helped, created a timeless mystique around Swami Vivekananda. This was his address at the worlds’ parliament of religion in Chicago on 11 Sept. 1893. Even to this Day, his address is seen as a turning point in Hindu reassertion and revival....<sup>2</sup>’.Some of them considered Swamiji’s role as a positive and reformative action which enriched Hinduism. Vivekananda criticised all the traditional evils of Hinduism and tried to give vedantic solutions.

**Banerjee,S** in her book ‘*Make Me A Man!*’ criticised, ‘Finally, the Hindu context of Vivekananda’s view of Indian womanhood is clear. It’s model Sita(consort of Rama, hero of the epic Ramayana),Rani of Jhansi , Savitri (lauded in Hindu mythology as the model of a devoted wife, Mira bai ( a princess who left her family to search for Devine Enlightenment), Ahalyabai( the powerful queen of Indore)- all derived from Hindu folklore. At times he did make comments that could be construed as critical of Islam.<sup>3</sup>’.

**Sharma,J** in his book *A Restatement of Religion: Swami Vivekananda and the making of Hindu Nationalism* mentioned that Vivekananda wanted to create a European society with India’s religion which is full of reason, scientism, nationalism, masculinity and orthodoxy.

**Sen** also criticised Vivekananda’s view on woman as ‘harsh and ‘insensitive’<sup>4</sup>.

**Bhide, NR** author of the book “Swami Vivekananda's Vision and Indian Womanhood: The Road Ahead”, answered a question on woman empowerment, ‘The issue of women’s empowerment is close to me. I feel we are going in the wrong direction when it comes to ‘Feminism’. A woman herself is a source of power and no one else can empower her. She has to realize this and manifest it. She cannot separate from the family, society or creation .Her empowerment means the empowerment of society. There is no individualistic approach to it. This is what Swamiji says, ‘The power can either be created or destroyed. We need to understand its constructive aspect. But the others have denied these above argument and believed that Vivekananda carried that negative bloodline of Hinduism which promoted caste oppression and gender inequality.

**Sheveland N John (2014)** argued that it is a herculean task for somebody to internalise Vivekananda’s thought. It is a dynamic affairs situated in time and place. There is an interreligious possibilities exist between Vivekananda’s thought which can establish harmonized society<sup>5</sup>.

**Malhotra, Rajiv (2013)** argued that there is a categorical impact of Swami Vivekananda on western intellectuals which revolutionised the European thinking process in many fields such like religion, psychology, philosophy, literature and popular culture. For decades after Vivekananda’s death his influence snowballed<sup>6</sup>.

**Sooklal Anil (1993)** argued that Swami Vivekananda’s Neo- Vedanta is totally different from Samkar’s traditional Vedanta preached unqualified monism a pure, simple and straight forward. Vivekananda’s view is a re-establishment, reconstruction, re-statement, revaluation, reorientation, reinterpretation of that traditional Vedanta with

modern arguments, in modern language, suited to modern man, adjusting it with all modern challenges<sup>7</sup>.

**Roy & Hammers (2014)** argued that Vivekananda's rhetoric created a binary i.e. India a spiritual dominant country and West as a carrier of material progress. He used spiritual power against British colonial power. Again Vivekananda remasculinized the Indian society which is against western liberalism as well as Indian Feminism<sup>8</sup>.

**Chowdhury (1998)** argued that Vivekananda was not against sexual energy but he was against the western obsession with the body. He believed in disciplining the body in order to train the spirit which advocates masculinism.

**Sil (1997)** pointed out that Swami Vivekananda inherited his gender consciousness from his culture, which encouraged the idea of de-eroticized woman as a mother figure and rejected the sexual female as an orge.

**Singh Lata (2014)** considered that Swami Vivekananda has unified one goal i.e. emancipation through many paths based on human virtues like education, yoga etc<sup>9</sup>.

**Ghosal (2012)** Swami Vivekananda had firm belief on oriental culture but he had broadness to accept whatever good of the West society. He tried to blend eastern spiritualism with western materialism<sup>10</sup>.

## **1.6. Research Methods**

The researcher will take qualitative method to pursue this research. The researcher will do thematic analysis Vivekananda's work through close reading. The researcher will

conduct semi structured interviews of the peoples, monks who are working on Vivekananda philosophy and his organisation.

## **1.7. Limitations**

The researcher will confine himself on the primary sources of Swami Vivekananda's Literature that is complete works of Vivekananda (vol.1-9).

## **1.8. Chapterisation**

1. Introduction
2. Theorising Women
3. Women and Hinduism
4. Women and Swamiji
5. Conclusion

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<sup>1</sup>Sen.AP (2002).*The Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol.61, No.1 Andrew O. Fort (ed.) pp. 317-319

<sup>2</sup>Sharma,Jyotirmaya. (2003).*Hindutva: Exploring the Idea of Hindu Nationalism*Publisher: Penguin Books

<sup>3</sup>Banerjee, Sikata.(2005).*Make Me a Man!: Masculinity, Hinduism, and Nationalism in India* Publisher: State University of New York Press.

<sup>4</sup>Sharma, Jyotirmaya. (2013). *A Restatement of Religion: Swami Vivekananda and the making of Hindu Nationalism* Publisher: Yale University Press.

<sup>5</sup>Sheveland N Jhon(2014), In search of wisdom and its blind spots : Catholic reflections on Swami Vivekananda's 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary, Sheveland International Journal of Dharma studies( Springer open journal), Retrieved from [http:// www.Internationaljournaldharmastudies.com/content/2/1/11](http://www.Internationaljournaldharmastudies.com/content/2/1/11)



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<sup>6</sup>Malhotra,Rajiv(2013), Vivekananda's Ideas and Two revolutions In western Thought, Vivekananda As The turning Point The Rise of A New Spiritual Wave, Swami Shuddhidananda(ed),Kolkata, AdvaitaAshrama

<sup>7</sup>Sooklal Anil(1993), The Neo-Vedanta philosophy of Swami Vivekananda *Nidan : International Journal for Indian Studies* 5,pp(33 –50)

<sup>8</sup>Roy & Hammers (2014) , Swami Vivekananda's Rhetoric of Spiritual Masculinity : Transforming Effeminate Bengalis into Virile Men, *Western Journal of Communication*, Vol. 78, No-September 2014,Routledge publication pp. 545-562

<sup>9</sup>Singh,L(2014),Reflections of Swami Vivekananda's Views on women Education in Current Scenario,*ISOR Journal of Economics and Finance*,Vol5,issue 5 pp-40-44

<sup>10</sup>Mondal, A and Mete(2012),Swami Vivekananda: Some Reflections on Education, *International Journal of Multidisciplinary Educational Research* Vol.1, Issues