

Swami Vivekananda: A Spiritual Luminary and Patriotic- Saint

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Abstract

Swami Vivekananda was one of the greatest souls ever born in India. He was saint, patriot and philosopher. His indomitable courage, broad vision, spiritual outlook, mature wisdom and deep knowledge blended with an unending spirit of patriotism made him an outstanding personality of the India as well as world. India is justly proud of this great genius. The philosophy of oneness of religion is of his universal appeal and he also believed that who had completely and unreservedly dedicated themselves to the worship of God through service of man. For this vision he started Rama Krishna Mission which stands as a shining example of his lofty ideals, such as humanity, caste system, spirituality, and ardent Nationalism. His teachings helped in revitalising the people of India from Himalayas to Cape of Comorin, by harmonising all differences and infusing enormous strength in their minds and helping to raise them from stupor, lethargy and despair. His contribution to awaken the people of India to a realisation of their cultural and spiritual heritage is immense. He is one of the immortals who have given a new direction to our thinking and action in the cultural and political fields. In this connection an attempt has been made in the paper to throw the light on the spirituality, humanity, outlook on caste system and patriotic thoughts of Vivekananda.

Introduction

Swami Vivekananda was one of the greatest souls ever born in India. He was saint, patriot and philosopher. His indomitable courage, broad vision, spiritual outlook, mature wisdom and deep knowledge blended with an unending spirit of patriotism made him an

outstanding personality of the India as well as world. India is justly proud of this great genius. The philosophy of oneness of religion is of his universal appeal and he also believed that who had completely and unreservedly dedicated themselves to the worship of God through service of man. For this vision he started Rama Krishna Mission which stands as a shining example of his lofty ideals, such as humanity, spirituality, and ardent Nationalism. He had given importance and suggestions for the development of low caste masses or downtrodden. His teachings helped in revitalising the people of India from Himalayas to Cape of Comorin, by harmonising all differences and infusing enormous strength in their minds and helping to raise them from stupor, lethargy and despair. His contribution to awaken the people of India to a realisation of their cultural and spiritual heritage is immense. He is one of the immortals we should know about the early life of Vivekananda, how he got these virtues.

Early life of Vivekananda

Swami Vivekananda was born as Narendranath in Calcutta, the former capital of British colonial India, on 12th January 1863. He belonged to an aristocratic traditional Bengali Kayastha (a caste Hindus) family. During his childhood, he was fascinated by the wandering ascetics and monks. He showed an inclination towards spirituality and God realisation which was stirred him to become ascetic. In Vivekananda family there was a precedence of ascetics, his grandfather Durga Charan Datta renounced the world at the age of twenty five and became a monk¹ probably Vivekananda was also influenced by his grandfather. His father Viswanath Datta was an attorney of Calcutta High court.² Viswanath Datta had a liberal, progressive outlook on social and religious matters.³ Bhuvanewari Devi mother of Vivekananda was a pious woman. The ascetic attitude of his grandfather, rational approach of his father and the religious temperament of his mother shaped young Vivekananda thinking and personality.⁴ In later life Vivekananda often referenced a saying of his mother, “Remain pure all your life; guard your own honour and never transgress the honour of others. Be very tranquil but when necessary harden your heart”.⁵ Vivekananda had interest and a wide range of scholarship in philosophy, religion, history, the social sciences, arts, literature, and other subjects. He had also interest in the Hindu scriptures such as the *Vedas* the *Upanishads*, the *Bhagavat Gita* the *Ramayana*, the *Mahabharata*, and the *Puranas*. He regularly participated in physical exercise, sports, and organizational activities. Even when he was young, he questioned the validity of superstitious customs and discrimination based on caste and refused to accept anything

without rational proof and pragmatic test. Latter his guru taught that service to the men is service to the God to carry this principle Vivekananda travelled extensively in India for visiting centers of learning, acquainting himself with the diverse religious traditions, different patterns of social life and poverty of India. He developed sympathy on the sufferers and poverty strike masses and resolved to uplift the nation. During these travels he made acquaintance with all cultures of individuals and stayed with Indians from all walks of life, he also met many scholars, Dewans, Rajas, Hindus, Muslims, Christians, *pariahs* workers (Dalit workers) and government officials.⁶ In these travels he tasted the feelings of spirituality, humanity, patriotism.

Vedanta or Spiritual Philosophy of Vivekananda

Some of the outstanding personalities in Indian History who had contributed to the political, cultural and spiritual regeneration of the people had been sanyasins or House holders, who had completely and unreservedly dedicated themselves to the worship of God through service of man such an enthusiastic man was Swami Vivekananda voiced the world-message of his master, the Message of Prabuddha Bharata, or the 'Awakened India.' Swami Vivekananda "was a strong revivalist force of the last quarter of the 19th century". He was the apostle of Modern Vedantism⁷ and preached that the world is not Maya or illusion but a stage in the evolution of mankind towards progress. The closing years of the 19th century had witnessed a period having its uniqueness in the history of India. There were the movements of social and religious revivalism which dug up the buried glories of India's past and brought them out into the limelight of India's reawakened consciousness. All social, religious reform organisations drew their inspiration from the Vedas, Upanishads, past history of India, and not only tried to awaken India but also give an impetus to national movement. One of the favourite subjects of these reform movements were the condemnation of caste system and an emphasis on the unity among the Indians. And this made its contribution towards the rise of nationalism. For this approach the Rama Krishna mission was formally founded by Vivekananda as a part of socio- religious reform movement for the propagation of Hindu Dharma and spread of patriotic ideas in India. He praised that our sacred mother land is a land of religion and philosophy, the birth place of spiritual giants, the land of renunciation, from the most ancient to the most modern times,⁸ there has been the highest ideal of life open to man. This is the mother of ethics, sweetness, gentleness and love.

Swami Vivekananda was questioned and pointed out by one of the lay disciples about the difficulty of establishing unity and harmony among the diverse sects in India. Vivekananda replied to the lay disciples with irritation: 'Don't come here anymore if you think any task too difficult. Through the grace of the Lord, everything becomes easy of achievement. Your duty is to serve the poor and the distressed without distinction of caste and creed. What business you have to consider the fruits of your action. Your duty is to go on working, and everything will set itself right in time, and work by itself. Swami Vivekananda said that my method of work is to construct, and not to destroy that which already exists....You are all intelligent boys and profess to be my disciples — he asked that what you have done. Couldn't you give away one life for the sake of others? “Let the reading of Vedanta and the practice of meditation and the like be left for the next life! Let this body go in the service of others and then I shall know you have not come to me in vain!”⁹

The Swami's mission was both national and international. He was a lover of mankind, strove to promote peace and human brotherhood on the spiritual foundation of the Vedanta that was oneness of existence. As a sage of the highest order, Vivekananda had a direct and intuitive experience of reality. He derived his ideas from that reliable source of wisdom and often presented them in the soul-stirring language of poetry. The natural tendency of Vivekananda's mind was to ascend above the world and forget itself in meditation of the absolute like that of his master Ramakrishna. But another part of his personality bled at the sight of human suffering in East and West alike. It might appear that his mind seldom found a point of rest in its oscillation between thought of God and service to man. Be that as it may, he chose in obedience to a higher call, service to man as his mission on earth and this choice has endeared him to people in the West, Americans in particular. In the course of a short life of thirty-nine years (1863-1902), of which only ten years were devoted to public activities and those too in the midst of acute physical suffering, he left for descendents his four classics: *Jnana-Yoga*, *Bhakti-Yoga*, *Karma-Yoga*, and *Raja-Yoga*, all of which are outstanding discourses on Hindu philosophy. In addition, he delivered innumerable lectures, wrote inspired letters in his own hand to his many friends and disciples, composed numerous poems, and acted as spiritual guide to the many seekers who came to him for instruction. He also organized the Ramakrishna Order of monks, which is the most outstanding religious organization of modern India. It is devoted to the propagation of the Hindu spiritual culture

not only in the Swami's native land, but also in America and in other parts of the world. Swami Vivekananda once spoke of himself as a 'condensed India.' His life and teachings are of inestimable value to the West for an understanding of the mind of Asia. William James, the Harvard philosopher, called the Swami the 'paragon of Vedantists.'¹⁰ Max Muller and Paul Deussen, the famous Orientalists of the nineteenth century, admired him in genuine respect and affection.

Swami Vivekananda's inspiring personality was well known both in India and in America during the last decade of the nineteenth century and the first decade of the twentieth. The unknown monk of India suddenly leapt into fame at the Parliament of Religions held in Chicago in 1893, at which he represented the soul ideals of Hinduism. His vast knowledge of Eastern and Western culture as well as his deep spiritual insight, ardent eloquence, brilliant conversation, broad human sympathy, colourful personality, and handsome figure made an irresistible appeal to the many types of Americans who came in contact with him. People who saw or heard Vivekananda even once still cherish his memory after a lapse of more than half a century. In America Vivekananda's mission was the interpretation of India's spiritual culture, especially in its Vedantic setting. He also tried to enrich the religious consciousness of the Americans through the rational and humanistic teachings of the Vedanta philosophy. In America he became India's spiritual ambassador¹¹ and pleaded eloquently for better understanding between India and the New World in order to create a healthy synthesis of East and West, of religion and science. In his own motherland Vivekananda is regarded as the patriot saint of modern India and an inspirer of her dormant national consciousness. To the Hindus he preached the ideal of a strength-giving and man-making religion. Service to man as the visible indication of the Godhead was the special form of worship he advocated for the Indians, devoted as they were to the rituals and myths of their ancient faith. Many political leaders of India have publicly acknowledged their indebtedness to Swami Vivekananda. He finally inspired that the Indian national life should be awakened and the vigorous Indians must conquer the world by Indian thought. Indian thought means philosophical and spiritual with its assistance once again go over and conquer the world. He instigated that, up India and conquers the world with your spirituality.

Patriotic views of Vivekananda

Subhas Chandra Bose eulogized about Vivekananda “he was so great, so profound, so talented. A yogi of the highest spiritual level in direct communion with the truth, who had, for the time being sacred his whole life to the moral and spiritual uplift of his nation and of humanity, that is how I would describe him. If he had been alive, I would have been at his feet. Modern India is his creation- if I err not”.¹²

Swami Vivekananda spiritual philosophy helped to raise the nationalist feelings among the young Indians. According to M.N. Roy, Vivekananda spiritualism and nationalism both were inseparable because he was a hero-prophet and a patriot-saint of India. Mr M.N. Roy in ‘India in Transition’ wrote about Vivekananda ‘His nationalism was spiritual imperialism’. He also informed that, Vivekananda called on young India to believe in the spiritual mission of India. His philosophy influenced greatly and which was subsequently built the orthodox nationalism of the declassed young intellectuals, organised into secret societies advocating violence and terrorism for the overthrow of British rule. Mr. Roy said that, he was a strong critic of social westernisation. Vivekananda wrote: “we must grow according to our nature; Vain is to attempt the lines of action that foreign societies have grafted upon us; it is impossible..... Suppose you can imitate the westerners, that moment you will die, you will have no more life in you”. He gave an inspiring call to Indians: “Thou brave one, be bold, take courage, be proud that thou art an Indian, and proudly proclaim. I am an Indian, every Indian is my brother.” Mr. Roy applauded that, the teaching of Vivekananda had profound effect on the educated elite and the masses and facilitated¹³ for the development of spirituality and national awakening. The great saint inspired the people of India to action for the indictment of freedom.

Swami Vivekananda patriotic quest was sent into the nerves of Indians and shook the India from her slumber of unhappiness through his poetic expressions.¹⁴ He directed that imitation is not civilisation. Do not behaved like another race and think for genuine that it will be better for India; all the Indians should be dressed like Indians. He articulated regarding Indians weaknesses, we have lost our faith. Why it is that we have been ruled by many foreign rulers for the last one thousand years and who chose to walk over prostrate bodies of ours. Because they have faith in themselves and we had not. Being conquered race we have enhanced ourselves and believed that we are not weak and have to fight for our independence in anything. We have to develop faith in our own selves.¹⁵

Vivekananda had himself combined passionate evocation of the glories of the Aryan tradition and Hinduism with bitter attacks on present day degradation of 'Our religion is in the kitchen. Our God is the cooking pot.'¹⁶ He preached this worldly type of religion, emphasizing self-help and the building-up of manly strength: 'What our country now wants are muscles of iron and nerves of steel.' Vivekananda's appeal, and his mixture of patriotism with the cult of manly virtues, vague populism, and evocation of Hindu glory was to prove stimulating wine indeed for young men in the coming of Swadeshi struggle.

Vivekananda advised that we cannot achieve without the associations of the world. We have many things to learn from west. We have to learn from the west her arts and sciences. We have to gain a little in material knowledge, in the power of organisation, in the ability to handle powers, organizing powers in bringing the best results in our routine life small struggles. He also recommended that we must travel and we must go to foreign parts. We must see how the engine of society works in other countries, and keep free and open communication with what is going on in the minds of other countries, if we really want to be a nation again. But remember that as Hindus everything else must be lower to our own national ideals. The secret of a true Hindu character lies in the subordination of his knowledge of European science and learning, of his wealth, position and name, to that one principal theme which is in born in every Hindu child- the spirituality and purity of the race. He question that can you make a European society with Indian's religion? He replied that, it is possible and must be trusted it.¹⁷ The country has fallen no doubt but will sure rise again and the upheaval will surprise the world. If there is the darkness of centuries in a room and we go into the room and begin to cry. "Oh it is dark!" will the darkness go? Bring in the light and darkness will vanish at once.¹⁸ Swami Vivekananda was favourably patriotic but there was no manner of difference in the national urge he tried to create and in the active internationalism in which he both strongly believed. Again he was successful in straining his utmost to stir up and bring to life the civic and social consciousness of the people of their times which had been covered with neglect and apathy.¹⁹

Views on caste system

Vivekananda condemned the caste system and the Hindu emphasis on rituals and superstitions, and urged the people to imbibe the spirit of liberty, quality and free- thinking.

Probably he never worked for the development lower classes conditions in the society but he showed the sympathy in his speeches and appealed upper castes not to practise discrimination policy towards the downtrodden. Vivekananda believed that one of the causes of India's disgrace was the neglect of the low caste masses and that became the great national sin. The political principles or governments would not pay any attention for the low caste masses in India are until well educated, well fed, and well cared for. He also said that, they pay for our education, they build our temples, but in return they obtained kicks. The masses that comprise the lowest caste, through ages of constant tyranny of the higher castes and by being treated with blows and jolts²⁰ at every step they took, have totally lost their manliness and become like professional beggars. Vivekananda advised to higher castes, if we want to regenerate India, we must work for them.

Equally remarkable was Vivekananda's concern for the plight of the 'Daridra – narayana'. His famous appeal that do not forget that the lower classes, the ignorant, the poor, the illiterate, the cobbler, the sweeper, they are our flesh and blood, they are our brothers.²¹ He therefore, advised to the upper castes to dedicate them towards the service of 'Daridranarayana' (God manifested in the hungry, destitute millions) to their up-liftment and edification.²² Formerly the upper castes were felt that we are pure and the whole world is impure. They followed and assumed that "Don't touch me!" "Don't touch me!" 'Now a day's Brahmins are neither in the recesses of the heart, nor in the highest heaven, nor in all beings now he in the cooking pot!'

He said that, we are orthodox Hindus, but we refuse to touch others and entirely to identify ourselves as pure with "Don't- Touchism." That is not Hinduism; it is in none of our books; it is an orthodox superstition, which has hindered with national efficiency and interest all along the line.²³ People were inclined to hold Hinduism, though all had equal rights to acquire tattva- jnana (knowledge of spirit), the difference of high and low should not be maintained in the day- to- day dealings and relations.²⁴ It was left to Swami Vivekananda to give this turn to the religious outlook of the Hindu by inculcating in him the ideal of self dedication to the cause of the service of humanity, to awaken the down- trodden people, to rouse his countrymen to stand on their feet and to be men inspired with the spirit of Karmayoga, which was his ideal. Swami Vivekananda developed and propagated the importance of Karmayoga, and, according to him, "action had to be accepted as all important

and essential even in the man of religion”.²⁵ This necessarily involved the fight against the ancient traditions according to which sanyasis of India had striven and struggled to realise their ideal of Mukthi, in isolation from society, and in meditation, thereby making them more or less lost to the outer world. This new approach of religious thought emphasised that the first and foremost duty of a man of religion in India was but boundless and unrelenting service rendered to his fellowmen without any distinction of religion, caste or creed.

Swami Vivekananda promulgated that according to Vedanta was no more than putting one into the task of saving the fated ones. Thus, a sanyasis in saffron garb dedicated not only to spiritual uplift but also to a drastic social reform and service to suffering humanity, was his ideal. He trusted on the Upanishads, which called leading the weak, the suffering and downtrodden, to stand on their feet and to be free from weakness.²⁶ Thus, mere worship of God with flowers and ritual yielded place to the worship of God by self-dedication and service to the cause of human beings who themselves belonged to and form of God, the universal soul and self improvement sought be spiritual discipline was replaced by the effort of the self to serve the human cause, helping and uplifting the downtrodden. Thus service to man came to be regarded as service to God both being treated as one and the same.²⁷ He educated us “The same soul resides in each and all. If you are convinced of this, it is your duty to treat all as brothers and serve mankind.”²⁸

Conclusion

Swami Vivekananda was most influenced person in Indian history. He was a revivalist and reformist, his thoughts relating to spirituality and humanity attracted in national and internationally. The idea of the development of daridranaryana is completely attached to the Vedanta philosophy that is invaluable service to the low castes. His philosophy of oneness of religion or God is taken attention in west countries and prevalently propagated there by the Ramakrishna mission. Even though he was a monk, his patriotic ideas were greatly inspired Indians. Especially the discourses of Vivekananda influenced many youngsters and they jumped into the Indian freedom movement. His nationalism and spiritualism both were inseparable. He said that we are all Indians but based on caste differences some of the low class masses far away from society and their services are not benefit to the country. Because of the caste differences we lost our unity which is later benefited to invaders. So he advised

the upper castes do not practise Don't Touch policy which is not inscribed anywhere in Hindu texts. He suggested that Indians must go to foreign countries to learn their knowledge which is help us to avoid ignorance. He not only made us conscious of our strength, he also pointed out our defects and drawbacks. He made people conscious of the ignorance and un- wisdom and the unity and fraternity.

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