

Swami Vivekananda: Human Evolution and Absolute Freedom

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Abstract

This is a humble attempt to project Swami Vivekananda as a great intellect, great orator, social reformer, philosopher, religious teacher, humanist and great lover of his motherland who is looked upon as a great religious teacher, thereby making a definite contribution to the study of both Hindu religion and philosophy and shows how his words possessed an inexplicable charm – a charm that captivated the hearts of millions of people all over the world.

Keywords: Vivekananda, spiritual voice, absolute freedom, great intellect, social reformer, humanist, charm

What is truly said and accepted is that Mother India has produced many great orators in the sand of time and Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902) holds his place respectively and proudly among that gentry. As the entire globe knows, Swami Vivekananda was a great intellect, great orator, social reformer, philosopher, religious teacher, humanist and great lover of his motherland. It is said that Swami Vivekananda is looked upon as a great religious teacher and one whose spiritual and physical powers shown in his deeds and action and indeed he made a definite contribution to the study of both Hindu religion and philosophy. He dedicated his life to the realization of Truth. His was an aim to uplift all the human beings from the lower level and goad them to experience the ultimate Bliss. His personality that carried an air of divinity was something great and dynamic. His words possessed an inexplicable charm – a charm that captivated the hearts of millions of people all over the world. Swami Tejasananda writes:

“The accumulated spiritual forces of
three hundred and thirty millions of people
compressed themselves as it were into
the multi coloured life of the towering
personality who set himself to the
Herculean task of rebuilding the nation

on the basis of a synthetic ideal bearing in it the best elements of the cultural contributions of the East and the West” (P 1).

Swami Vivekananda occupies a unique place in the Indo-Anglian literature by his outstanding contribution. His contribution consists in his speeches, letters, and poems etc. “Swami Vivekananda lectured, letters and writings reveal not the dry intellect of a thinker, but the outpourings of a heart, the spontaneous outburst of a heart deeply stirred” (Sastri 294). Vivekananda was intensely moved by the sufferings of humanity and particularly of the humanity in India. He discovered the greatness of man and particularly of men in the humble walks of life who were the despised and denied in the Indian society. He was deeply interested in serving the poor people and all those who are living miserable and hard lives all over the world. He exhorted:

“Have charity towards all beings.
Pity those who are in distress”.

He also said once:

“yes, a daily worship at the feet of beggars,
after bathing and before the meal,
would be a wonderful training of heart
and hand together” (P 15).

He believed that the service to humanity and Karma could lead man to great heights. Sister Nivedita expresses the same thus:

“This is the realization, which makes
Vivekananda the great preacher of Karma,
Not as divorced from but as expressing
Jnana and Bhakti. To him, the worship,
The study, the farmyard and the field
are as true and fit scenes for
the meeting of God with man as the call
of the monk or the doors of the temple.
To him, there is no difference between
service of man and worship of God,
between manliness and faith, between
true righteousness and spirituality”

(Nivedita)

Within this realization, Vivekananda wanted to elevate man to his own height of spirituality. By preaching the values of love, kindness, affection and spirit of service to humanity, he so desired to make human beings stand on the ground of universal equality, unity, love and fraternity. He exhorted:

“God has become man,
man will become God again”

In the Indian tradition, philosophy and religion have always gone hand in hand. Our philosophers never adopted the western philosophical outlook of an intellectual aloofness that seeks to steer clear of religion. When philosophy accepts the furtherance of man’s spiritual life as its aim, it becomes the best ally of religion, exercising an ennobling and liberalizing influence on it. Swami Vivekananda’s philosophical lectures do provide and present the universal spiritual values and their rational justification without reference to any particular cult or creed. “Though their background is Vedantic, they are so closely related to the fundamentals of spiritual life that the followers of any religion will find in them some aid both to deepen and broaden their faith” (P iv).

Religion, if it is to be a potent force in the life of man, must provide him with strength and inspiration in all situations of life. The Vedantic teaching of faith in oneself based on the idea of one’s inherent Divinity is the best means for generating this strength and inspiration. In the lives of all great men and women that history knows, it was their tremendous faith in themselves and their mission that led to their achievements. All the difference between man and man arises from the degree of faith they have in themselves. Vivekananda puts a question, “Do you know how much energy, how many powers, how many forces, are still lurking behind that frame of yours? He adds thus: “... behind you is the ocean of infinite power and blessedness ... If matter is powerful, thought is omnipotent. The God whom people usually worship as a far off and unknown being, is in the Vedanta the too-well-known and the closest object to us. The God of Vedanta is “identical with the Self and therefore the nearest of the near. It is through the self we know everything” (P 5).

We need both strength and goodness Swami Vivekananda says, “It is the journey from truth to truth, from lower truth to higher truth. Darkness is less light; evil is less good; impurity is less purity”. (P 3) An average man has both goodness and strength on the lower side. To become a perfect man, one needs to develop both strength and goodness. Everybody wants success in this objective world. If that be the case, the sequence in which strength and goodness are developed is more important than anything else. When one improves goodness first and strength later, one becomes a theoretician lacking focus on the execution of work thereby leading to inefficiency and failure for accomplishing goals despite goodness. On the other hand, when one improves strength first and goodness later, one can attain success in this objective world because of the strength of faith in oneself, courage and the power to stay focused on, the execution of work. But this stage of more strength and less goodness is only an intermediate stage. Having enjoyed success in material things, one needs to transform

oneself from self-centeredness to an altruistic approach. Swami Vivekananda lays focus on “strength first and goodness next”. Strength is a very complex word. In simple terms, it refers “to the state or quality of being strong ... among other things, physical strength, mental strength, intellectual strength, capacity to act courageously, having faith in one self and capacity to stay focused on the execution of work” (Sarma 10). Vivekananda realised that sincere and earnest efforts should be taken to enlighten the people the people on how spiritualism is an essential and integral part of life. He proclaimed that “the present age requires new modes of thought and new life” (CW 129). To introduce the life of Swami Vivekananda is to introduce the subject of spiritual life itself” (P 1). It is not necessary here to summarise the life of Swami Vivekananda. In fact, to think about such an inspiring person as Swami Vivekananda, fills everyone with a new spirit. He practised spiritual exercises and as a result, experienced a kind of Bliss which he wanted everyone to experience. It should be added that “Swami never propounded any new philosophy; nor did he try to impose his philosophy on others. As Tapash Sankar Dutta puts it,

“Swamiji revived that old spirit, recast and recommended it to make it more relevant to the modern world – full of complexities and contradictions” (P 265).

According to Swami Vivekananda, the world, as a whole, stands divided into two parts – the East and West. The East remained poor by resorting to spiritual experience and realization and the West, by inventing more and more through science, increased the materialistic pleasures. Swami realised that there should be harmony between materialism and spiritualism, otherwise there should be an incompleteness in human life. Human life revolves round two things – materialism and spiritualism. To keep and maintain a complete life, there should be a harmonious blend of materialism and spirituality and materialism should be gradually but ultimately be subordinated to spiritualism. This way of living is something an ideal one for Swami – ideal in the sense the hopes, desires and aspirations of a human being could be achieved to some extent. Neither should the hopes, desires and aspirations be suppressed nor should they be allowed to remain unfulfilled. He preached an easy way of canalizing and sublimating them. By canalising and sublimating them a human being could reach higher levels towards the realization of Truth, the goals of human life.

India, from time immemorial, has been a rich source of great spiritual power giving birth to a long line of mystics and earnest seekers of Truth. It was natural for a person like Swami Vivekananda to experience certain Indian spiritual ideals and endeavour to make them comprehensive to the common man. He wished that what he wanted to speak should be in ordinary language shorn of conventional scholarly and mystifying phraseology of the philosophers. Language should not be a barrier but an easy conveyance of one’s thoughts. “His words in English have since become a new gospel. Through English he gave voice to his mission and expression to that which he himself was the centre of a spiritual world impulse”

(LSV 29). It should be made clear that his thoughts are his personal experiences. By constant and steadfast experiences, he realised certain truths, which, he thought, could help human beings in keeping their lives peaceful and happy. The speeches of Swami Vivekananda were extempore. It must be said that he had a divine grace which inspired his speeches keeping the audience spell-bound. Whenever he spoke, his voice electrified the audience. “He had a dynamic dominating and magnetic personality. The charm and power of his eloquence captivated all” (Jagtiani 5). Never did he suffer from paucity of words or ideas. Ideas and words were so harmoniously blended that there had always been an incessant flow of speech. He proved that he could convey to the audience any abstract idea in a lucid and simply way. Having had a personal and direct contact with Swami Ramakrishna, Swami Vivekananda knew fully well as to how to make the listener understand him. T. Muttucumaru aptly comments:

“He who has realised the Atman becomes a storehouse of great power. From him as the centre, a spiritual force emanates, working within certain radius; people who come within this circle become inspired with his ideas and are overwhelmed by them” (P 138).

Praising Vivekananda’s vigour of spirituality and personality, Arun Bhattacharya states:

“His greatness lies in the fact that in the nineteenth century when India was considered a backward country which had everything to learn from Europe, he proved the world that India had a great religion and culture which Europe should learn” (P 13).

Swami Vivekananda considered religion as “the manifestation of the divinity that is already in man”. According to him, religion is a growth from within till one reaches the last stage of human evolution, when the individual realizes within his own self all his dreams of perfection and absolute freedom, and discovers the kingdom of heaven that has been lying all the time within the heart. When man does conquer his inner nature, he becomes perfect and finds God, the ever-free master of nature, the living ideal of perfection and absolute freedom, as the essence of his own being. He is of the view that since realisation is the core of religion, religion consists in realisation.

To conclude, this manifestation of Swami Vivekananda was inspired by his own realization and his theory of practical Vedanta. This theory contains some highest ideas and

ideals – unity or oneness in the cosmos, unshakable faith in oneself. God realization in oneself and in society, need of synthesis between the East and the West, toleration of other religions, acceptance of other, forms of worship, justification of the means by the ends, to see God in everything, etc, that may inspire not only one’s individual life but also the national and international life. No doubt, he is remembered as a dynamic spiritualist who served God by serving others. “He leaves behind indelible footprints which none of the historical forces and none of the vagaries of fate can efface” (Bhajananda 464). In a word, it may be said that being the promoters of religion, he dreamed of a universal religion holding together all the truths of all religions for he was not an Indian but a universal prophet appreciating the truths of all religions and developing a broader outlook in life in all respects.

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