

Swami Vivekananda's Blend of Materialism and Spiritualism

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Abstract

This paper examines the blend of materialism and spiritualism as reflected in his spiritual orientation and humanistic outlook in life.

Keywords: Vivekananda, spiritualism, materialism

Modern India has produced many great orators. Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902) holds a significant place among them. He was born on Monday, January 12th, 1863. His pre-monastic name given by his family was Narendranath. His education began with learning the Bengali alphabet/script and initial English words from his mother. His boyish imagination very often travelled back to the hallowed days of the epic past, when he listened with rapt attention to the romantic tales of the **Ramayana** as told by his mother, and he became so much thrilled to hear their soul-stirring episodes that he began to offer worship to Sita-Ram and earnestly longed to have a vision of the devout Hanuman. Once he meditated in a room of his house with so much rapt attention that the door of the room had to be broken to awaken him. Thus, the “Yogic consciousness” was evident in him from his childhood days. His rousing and fiery words coloured with Hindu mythologies are still inspiring many devotees and others both in the East and the West:

“From dreams awake, from bonds of to be free
Be not afraid. This mystery
My Shadow, cannot frighten me,
Know once for all that I am He.” (CWSV, p.8)

It is said that Vivekananda preached aggressive Hinduism to the world. He himself expressed his aim of life to Sister Nivedita thus:

“to make Hinduism aggressive,
like Christianity and Islam and
to effect an exchange of the highest
ideals of the East and the West and
to realize these in practice.” (CWSV, p.8)

His aim was to serve the Humanity in all respects. Swami Vivekananda was moved by the love of Jesus Christ. He was also inspired by the Compassion of Buddha. During his speeches, he laid emphasis on love and compassion. In the Modern World, love and compassion would contribute a lot to bring in integration of human society.

The spiritualism of Vivekananda consists of love and compassion. Many of his lectures and speeches delivered in small congregations dealt mainly with love and compassion. Sister Nivedita says:

“To not a few of us, the words of Swami
Vivekananda came as a living water
to man perishing of thirst.” (Swami Vivekananda: Select Speeches, p.147)

Swami Vivekananda is one of the most powerful spiritualists India has ever given to the world. His sole purpose was to blind the human beings of all nations with spirituality. He was not just an Indian, but he was a universal prophet. He dreamed of a universal religion holding together the truths of all religions: “The Swami is not a sectarian; he is the promoter of religion, not of one religion only. The exponents of single points in the vast field of religions can find nothing in him to fight” (Nivedita, 145)

Though he preached the Vedanta philosophy, he appreciated the truths of other religions; for he found that the truths of all religions are the same. Religion is an institution of principles and dogmas. The aim of established religious is to seek divinity and realize God through lofty principles. As he himself said, “All narrow, limited, fighting ideas of religion have to go. All sect ideas and tribal or national ideas of religion must be given up” (The Collected Works of Swami Vivekananda, Vol. II, p.67). His contribution consists in his speeches, letters, poems, etc. In the words of P.S. Sastri, “Swami Vivekananda’s lectures, letters and writings reveal not the dry intellect of a thinker, but the outpourings of heart, the spontaneous outburst of a heart deeply stirred’ (p.294).

Powerful words were addressed by Swami Vivekananda to the entire humanity in the World Parliament of Religions. He declared, “I thank you in the name of the most ancient order of monks in the world; I thank you in the name of the mother of religion, and I thank you in the

name of the millions and millions of Hindu people of all classes and sects. ... We believe not only in universal toleration, but we accept all religions to be true.” <http://languageinindia.com/march2005/parliamentofreligions1.html>. His popularity spread all over the world.

“To introduce the life of Swami Vivekananda is to introduce the subject of spiritual life itself” (Jagtiani,1). To think about such an inspiring person as Swami Vivekananda fills everyone with a new spirit. He practiced 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. “Swamiji revived that old spirit, recast and recommended it to make it more relevant to the modern world – full of complexities and contradictions”. (Dutta, 265)

According to Vivekananda, the world, as a whole, stands divided into two parts – the East and the West. The East remained poor by resorting to spiritual experience and realization and the West, by investing more and more through science, increased the materialistic pleasures. Vivekananda argued that there should be an incompleteness in human life. Human life revolves round two things – materialism and spiritualism (**Swami Vivekananda: Select Speeches**). To keep and maintain a complete life, there should be a harmonious blend of materialism and spiritualism and materialism should be gradually but ultimately be subordinated to spiritualism.

India has been a source of spiritual power giving birth to a long line of mystics and earnest seekers of Truth. It was natural for a person like Vivekananda to experience certain Indian spiritual ideals and endeavour to make them comprehensible to the common man. It is said that Vivekananda had a divine grace which inspired his speeches keeping the audience spell-bound. “He had a dynamic dominating magnetic personality. The charm and power of his eloquence captivated all” (Jagtiani, 5).

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