

Jharna Bhattacharyya

Scottish Church College

Vivekananda: The Forerunner of Indian Renaissance

Swami Vivekananda, the man with intense love for his own country and countrymen, tried all through his life to reform and regenerate India, in a way which is unique in the sense, that nobody before him, had ever thought of revitalizing India in that way and never even had succeeded in pointing out the real causes of the degeneration of Indian society and the Indians, as a whole, as Swamiji pointed out, and provided the necessary solutions which are to be followed, if we, the Indians, really want to thrive India with 'Renaissance'. Swamiji said once, *"This national ship, my countrymen, my friends, my children- has been ferrying millions and millions of years across the waters of life.... But today perhaps through your fault this has become a little damaged, has sprung a leak, but would you, therefore, curse it? ... If there are holes in the national ship, this society of ours – we are its children let us go and stop the leaks. Let us gladly do it with our heart's blood and if we cannot, then let us die... Never condemn it, say not one harsh word against this society. I love it for its past greatness. I love you all because you are the children of gods, because you are the children of those glorious forefathers. I have come now to sit in your midst and if we are to sink, let us all sink together but never let curses rise up to our lips."* (The Nationalistic and Religious Lectures of Swami Vivekananda, Page- 47).

Swami Vivekananda, a true patriot, we can say, had a heart, which succeeded to sense the heartbeat of the mother India. His heart had bled for this country. If we sincerely try to read and analyze how much he had love this country, we will realize his thought and his dream,

which he wanted to actualize through sincere love, sacrifice and service to this country. Swamiji, when went to America for participation in The Parliament of Religion as a delegate, the prime focus of his journey was not any personal achievement or glory, but was to broadcast the glory of ancient India, its heritage and at the same time to make them identify the degeneration of this country caused by various foreign colonialism. He, with firm belief, announced that India must be reawakened in the near future and will regain her past glory. But also alleged that India, though rich in spirituality, for modern technology and science she must learn from the west. It was his unyielding conviction that someday or other the world will surrender to our mother India for spirituality and universal brotherhood. At the same time he recognized that the regeneration of India was not possible without the blessings of science and technology. In Chicago Swamiji advocates the practical religion, the impartial truth of the Upanishads and confirmed that the teachings of the Upanishads only can abolish the differences among the human being and can bring the pure blessings of the heaven, the ultimate peace. The path to reawakening according to him was true love for living god, the poor and the looser; the sacrifice for the cause of the uplift of the human being and society; unending service for the weak and down trodden people of one's own country and abroad and the realization of the 'religion' in true sense of the term, were necessary. At the same time the uplift of the women and oppressed by rendering practical education that is conducive to a better reverential life, was his mission.

Swamiji pointed out certain reasons which were responsible for the downfall of India. Swami Ananyananda in his article, "Vivekananda: His Vision of An Awakened India" wrote, "*He pointed out that the present decadence of our country was due to various reasons, such as,*

- 1) *Not taking inspiration from the past and working on those lines,*

- 2) *Developing a very narrow isolationistic and restricted outlook with regard to other countries,*
- 3) *Perversion of the life-current of her national existence-religion, and*
- 4) *Tyranny over the masses by the so called higher castes and the neglect of our women.”(Page- 424)(source- net)*

Swamiji understood that India, his motherland, a land of sages, had been degraded by a group of young people who had no respect for their past heritage, who are selfish, lazy and jealous of each other. They found beauty and grandeur only in the blind imitation of the western culture and in the imitation of the western style and living. They had no idea about their own glory and no respect for own culture. They were devoid of self-respect. The lack of true education and true leadership, India was sinking in deep disregard for her own. It was sensed by Swamiji that as if India was losing faith for herself and the genius of her children. The so called national movement and the reform initiatives were not as much fruitful as was needed. They seemed to him either non-national or anti-national. He saw no hope all around the country. He realized that everything was proved to be futile because they had no respect for their own culture and heritage, and at the same time no belief in that Supreme power that is hidden behind everything in this nature. Our very own spiritual background was missing in those attempts. Failure after failure was the destiny of ours. Swamiji, while roaming in every remote corner in India as a ‘Paribrajaka’, ‘roaming sannyasin’ had felt the cause of degradation of India. India, if, could have gone to the world abroad to disclose her hidden spirituality and earned respect from the entire world, if she took the blessings of the science and technology from the west without hesitation, the Swami said that, then and then only the reformation of the country was possible. Swamiji said, *“On our work depends the coming of the India of the future. She is there ready, waiting. She is only sleeping. Arise and awake, and see her seated here on the throne, rejuvenated more glorious than she ever was – this*

motherland of ours.” (*The Nationalistic and Religious Lectures of Swami Vivekananda*, Page – 29).

Swamiji was not a man with strong political back ground. On the contrary he was a man with a strong spiritual back ground mixed with fervent patriotism. It is a common belief that patriotism is connected with political activities. At the period of pre- independence the atmosphere was such that, it was the conviction, that the act of patriotism and the process of reform must be some way or other, associated with politics. But the struggle of independence and the act of reformation of the society always need some sort of self-illumination and fearlessness. Age old superstitions and racism along with the political subjection by the Western powers, practically, destroyed the self-respect, strength and courage of the Indian inhabitants and they could not but thought that they had lost their vital force, and everything, coming from western part, was the only thing, the imitation of which could bring back to them their lost eminence. But, a nation, which is annulled from inside, cannot but dream only for a magnificent future. Vivekananda founded the Ramakrishna Math and Mission in 1896 to propagate the teaching of his Master Ramakrishna Paramahansa. Vivekananda can be understood only in the light of the realizations of his Master, Ramakrishna Paramahansa. It was based on the dictum “Atmanomokṣārartham Jagaddhitāyaca’, for the salvation of one's own soul and the welfare of the world.

Swamiji and the others like him actually did the thing which was then the prime need of the society and its people. They revitalized the Indian people with their works and deeds. They made them understood that India had a glorious past and a treasure of inimitable spirituality that can be broad casted for the betterment of the world- society and no reason, was there for us, to feel ashamed as we had not have so much scientific and technological progress as the Western countries had. They said that spirituality was our main character and the backbone of our society. If we threw it out from our life and civilization that will pave the way to

destruction, said Vivekananda. Every nation has its own identity and is ours, and that is spirituality. Though the Swami was educated in Westernized education and at a time he had a strong belief in scientific and logical derivations, at the feet of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa, later on, he learnt the real truth, and the whole mystery behind this universe unfold its reality to him. He saw in his Guru the perfect embodiment of the Vedantic truth and surrender unconditionally. This lesson of spiritual discipline made him perfectly wise and he realized the real cause of the downfall of his nation. So, his treatment to his nation was totally different from that of other reformers of the country. He called for ‘perfect men’, because the nation at that time was badly needed for honest, selfless, dedicated young people. He, instead of doing big talks, called for ‘selfless work’ and tried to revive the lost spirit of the country, remembering them their glorious past. It is true that he has not fought any freedom fight for India, but he made the temperament, the solid mentality which was necessary for the freedom fighters and this is, in the true sense of the term, the root cause of Indian independence and Indian renaissance. Swami Tapasyananda ji said in his article, ‘*Swami Vivekananda And Indian Renaissance*’, “*The sense of a national destiny and confidence in the power of a people and their tradition are the essential requisites of a national revival, and in so far as Swami Vivekananda’s appearance made a vital contribution in this direction, it was as important an event in the development of Indian Nationalism as the Dandi March, the Quit India Campaign, and the achievement of Indian Independence.*”(Page – 237-238).

Swami Vivekananda was of the opinion that the revival of Indian society is possible and he gave the way out which was unique and at the same time practical. First of all, he diagnosed the disease and then treated it as per. He found the oppression of the higher class upon the miserable ones, he found poverty which had weakened the major part of the common people of our country and last but not the least the ill-treatment to the women which was a chronic disease that had made the race paralyzed. Swamiji called for the worship of the ‘Virat’, the

God that we see all around us. He urged for the worship of the masses ‘siva jnane jiva seva’. Nor did he ask for the worship of God or for the worship of the King. He asked for selfless service to the nation and to the mankind in general, that, which the real worship to the Lord is. The Untouchability, according to him, was an inhuman treatment to our fellow men and he strongly opposed to this. Finally he advised for proper education, education which was conducive to fulfill the practical need of our daily life. He urged for female education. This must be a mixture of our age old culture, our spiritual heritage and of modern scientific knowledge, he propagated. He was of the opinion that we must learn the modern technology and science but the spirituality must be the thirist area of our interest. We must have a firm hold on the spiritual ideals depicted in the Upanishads. The universal principles of these texts are related to the inner growth of man and they are not like the so called organized religious theories and dogmatic theories or principles. They are compatible with the scientific theories and with the modern technical laws of life. If we disregard those norms in pursuit of the western material glory, it will be the beginning of overall destruction of the nation itself.

Swamiji asked for the cultivation of our past heritage, not only because he was an Indian and in mere pride, he preached us the eternal principles of the Upanishads. The fact is that he observed the Western history and their society and realized that though they had conquered the material prosperity, they lack the inner peace. The material luxury may give us glory but never can satisfy our need for love, peace and solidarity. The principles of our age old ‘sastras’ have that intense power which alone can bring the peace of heaven. The Swami had a strong belief that the civilization of India has passed 4000 years and still has that glory because the principles embodied in them are eternal and self- revealed. India is that auspicious land where these eternal laws have been revealed to the ancient sages and preserved for so many ages. Swamiji said once, *“This idea that our land is a sacred place , a punnya bhumi, was a traditional belief with me, but having seen the world at large and the*

life of people in the other parts of the world, what was a mere belief has now become a firm conviction. If there is any land to which all souls on this earth must come to account for their Karma and attained their last birth before salvation, - the land where humanity has attained its highest towards gentleness, generosity, purity and calmness, and above all, the land of introspection and spirituality, - it is India. In the past, from here have proceeded great ideas of religion and waves of spirituality to all the surrounding countries, and in future, too, the wave that is going to spiritualize the materialistic civilization and quench the burning fire of materialism in other parts of the world, has to originate in India.” (The Nationalistic and Religious Lectures of Swami Vivekananda, Page – 12).

Some may conclude that Vivekananda had an inflexible approach regarding science and its beneficiary. But this is absolutely wrong. Swamiji, instead of blaming or cursing the modern science and technological up gradation have welcome whole heartedly the achievements and benefits that had been offered by them. He thought that science has given man leisure from their strenuous work and secured opportunity for innovative thinking and other important businesses. Man has got the real value of being a human being. Science has made the human society more privileged and organized. But he was at the same time realized that, though men were advancing in technology and science, science never can solve the problem of disintegrated races. Never can it abolish the curse of hatred and never can be able to merge the differences among various religious sects to lay down the foundation of world peace, the universal brotherhood. So in spite of the rigorous aspirations of the human races spirituality is the only thing that will reign forever. Swamiji not only was an admirer of modern science and technology, he used to encourage young generation to be accustomed with those things, and persuaded them to take active part in the vanguard of progress. He wanted a socialistic society because the sufferings of the poor and miserable condition of his countrymen had made him cry. He wanted to reconcile physical body with spirit because this can only make

man realize his own divinity. He wanted our women to be educated for their own well being and for a better generation to come. He wanted the teachings of the Upanishads to be flooded over the universe because it is the eternal truth that can provide the ultimate end, the freedom of soul, the salvation. Renaissance is the other name of freedom, freedom from all binding, freedom from prejudice, from orthodoxy, from mean mindedness, from humbleness to the supremacy, the ultimate union with that Ultimate Being, 'mukti'. The entire teaching of Vivekananda is based on the central truth of Vedanta, the realization of the essential identity between Brahman and Atman. The Mahavākhyas as well as the learnings in the Upanisads - Aham Brahma Asmi, Tat Tvam Asi, Sarvam Khalu idam Brahma etc. indicate the message of the unity of macrocosm and microcosm. The Universal Religion of Vivekananda upholds love, peace, religious tolerance, co-operation and goodwill among nations. Revolutionaries of the Indian freedom struggle were often found with a pocket edition of Swami Vivekananda's works with them. Right from Bal Gangadhar Tilak to Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose, Swamiji would often be mentioned in their speeches or conversations.

Let us remember the marvelous and enthusiastic words advocated by Swami Vivekananda, *“Arise, awake from this hypnotism of weakness. None is really weak. The soul is infinite, omnipotent and omniscient. Stand up. Assert yourself and proclaim the God within you. Do not deny Him.... O ye modern Hindus! Dehypnotize yourselves. The way to do that is found in your own books.....Power will come. Glory will come. Purity will come, and everything that is excellent will come, when this sleeping soul is roused to self-conscious activity.”* (*The Nationalistic and Religious Lectures of Swami Vivekananda, Page – 40*). These were the words of Swami Vivekananda, the great spiritual leader that India has ever produced.

Bibliography: -

1. Vivekananda the Great Spiritual Teacher; A compilation; Advaita Ashrama; Published by Swami Bodhasarananda, Adhyaksha, Advaita Ashrama. Fourth reprint – October – 2012.
2. The Nationalistic and Religious Lectures by Swami Vivekananda; Condensed and Retold by Swami Tapasyananda; Advaita Ashrama; Published by Swami Bodhasarananda, President, Advaita Ashrama. Third Impression, May – 2008. Swami Vivekananda and Indian Renaissance, An article by Swami Tapasyananda. Source – Internet.
3. Swami Vivekananda and Indian Renaissance, An article by Swami Tapasyananda. Source – Internet..