



SWAMI VIVEKANANDA'S VIEWS ON RELIGION, EDUCATION AND SPIRITUALITY AS NOTHING BUT THE ESSENTIALS FOR BUILDING UP OF A GREAT FUTURE OF INDIA: AN ANALYSIS

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Abstract

This paper examines Swami Vivekananda's views on education, religion and spiritual ethics and also projects him as a moral and dedicative teacher proving that he can mould other westerner's minds and thereby achieve immortal recognition as a teacher, guide and spiritual drifter.

Swami Vivekananda was one of the great religious minds of the 19th century, whose appearance before the Congress of World Religions in America was a momentous event in the history of religion. He was born and brought up in an environment of the compendium of religion, reform, patriotism, profound identification of religion with realization, sacrifice and universal love practiced by Sri Ramakrishna, an intellectual reasoned approach to religion represented by Raja Ram Mohan Roy and Devandranath Tagore, the emotionalism and mysticism imparted by Keshab Chandra Sen, new social radicalism contributed by the Sadhavan Brahmo Samaj and the Chatterjee and the Arya Samaj in the Punjab. His contribution to literature was found to be in his speeches, letters, poems etc.

Swami Vivekananda's writings, lectures and letters reveal not the dry intellect of thinker but the outpourings of a heart, the spontaneous outburst of a heart deeply stirred. He was thoroughly familiar with the human situation in both East and West. His interest was not confined only to philosophy. Poetry also attracted him and especially P.B. Shelley whose "Hymn to intellectual Beauty" moved him with its picture of a spiritual principle of unity as no philosopher of universalism had succeeded in doing. Wordsworth with his experienced visions of ecstasy was of course the great star of his poetic firmament. Vivekananda was a great believer in education as an instrument for human betterment. His speeches and letters are full of references to the degradation in which the masses had fallen because of the denial of literacy and education to them. He scoffed at the importance being given by the educational system to book learning and memory training. He pointed out that the end of all education, all training, should be man-making and to the end and aim of all training was to make the man grow. "It is a man-making religion that we want. It is non-making theories that we want. It is man-making education all round that we want" (CWSV, 224). He had an imperious personality which was not only powerful but also radiant. He himself-his majestic presence, his keen wit and powerful intellect, his unmistakable and towering spirituality – had been no less an eye-opener". Unlike the traditional men of religion, he had "an amazing sense of humour and had no hesitation in making fun of himself" (Rao, 210). He like human beings and loved to laugh with them. He condemned hypocrisy and all weakening ideals in all walks of life including religion and advocated the practical expression of the loftiness of the spirit that is the mark of heroism.

The heart of Vivekananda's teaching was in "the 'sphere of religion'". (Rao, 141). Religion is an institution of principles and dogmas. It is "an intrinsic element of human nature" (Radhakrishnan, 8). Vivekananda did proclaim, "The end and aim of all religions is to realize God. The greatest of all training is to worship God alone" (p.82). The Swami never tried to preach applicability of all religions. There should be tolerant attitude on the part of every religion. In his address to the final session of the Parliament of Religion, he said, "The Christian is not to become a Hindu or a Buddhist, nor a Hindu or a Buddhist to become a Christian; but each must assimilate the spirit of others and yet preserve his individualism and grow according to his own law of growth" (p.24). Thus, Vivekananda upheld the validity of all religions and their right to independent existence and he called the religion he preached practical Vedanta. He found practical Vedanta immanent in all religions. To Vivekananda, religion was not just a question of belief. He said that religion was realization, not talk, not doctrine... It was being and becoming... it was the whole soul becoming changed into what it believed. That was religion.

Swami Vivekananda preached the practice of meditation and concentration as the basic principle in education. He contributed a lot to the concept of modern education for integrated human development. Completely rejecting the concept of memory-filling processes, he was in favour of man-making education. He defined education as the training by which the current and expression of will are brought under control and become fruitful. He was of the view that education should aim at developing the mind rather than stuff it with bookish knowledge. According to him, the present system of education in India does not help the people. Indian people want that education by which character is formed, strength of mind is increased, the intellect is expanded and by which one can stand on one's feet. He said, "Education is the manifestation of the perfection already in man" (p.358). All knowledge, secular or spiritual is inherent in man; no knowledge comes from outside. It is all inside. In many cases, it is not discovered, but remains covered and when the covering is taken off, it is said that one of learning. Like



fire in a pie of flint, knowledge exists in the mind. Suggestion is the friction which brings it out” (p.28) The Swami stressed the importance of liberty as the first condition of growth and pointed out how Sri Ramakrishna world encourage even those worthless people and change the very course of their lives thereby. The external teacher offers only suggestion which rouses the internal teacher to work to understand things. So Vivekananda evidently felt that intellectual growth would not come through formal education and growth would come only through the healthy exercise of the pupils mind and so Vivekananda evidently felt and said, “To me, the very essence of education is concentration of mind, not the collection of facts” (p.38). The more the power of concentration, the greater the knowledge that is acquired. The cook with concentration will cook a meal all the better. In making money or in worshipping God, or in doing anything, the stronger the power of concentration, the better that thing be done. The trained mind never makes a mistake practice makes a man perfect. The main difference between men and animals is the difference in their power of concentration. The Greeks applied their concentration to the external world and the result was perfection in art, literature etc. The Hindu concentrated on the internal world, upon the unseen realms in the self and developed the science of Yoga. Thus, the power of concentration is the only key to the treasure-house of knowledge.

The Swami was a great and forceful personality and his sayings on education are as inspiring as the rest. Some of the sayings may seem to be bearing more on religion than on education. They have been included as it was the opinion of the Swami that a “pure and religious life is the foundation of all education and culture” (Rao, 211-12). Religions is the inner most core of education and one should live from his very boyhood with one whose character is a blazing fire and should have before him a living example of the highest teaching. In India, the imparting of knowledge has always been through men of renunciation. The old system of education in India was very different from the modern system. In the olden days, it was though that knowledge was so sacred that no man ought to sell it. Knowledge was imparted to the students free of cost and fees. There are certain conditions necessary for the taught are purity in thought, speech and action, a real thirst for knowledge and preserverence. In regard to the teacher it is essential that he should know the spirit of the scriptures. It is the knowledge of the spirit of the scriptures aleen that constitutes the true religious teacher. The second condition necessary for the teacher is ‘sinlessness’ something real and appreciable as an influence comes from the teacher and goes to the taught. His teaching task should be simply out of love, out of pure love for mankind at large. The only medium through which spiritual force can be transmitted is ‘love’. So Vivekananda said, “Any selfish motive such as the desire for gain or for name, will immediately destroy this conveying medium” (CW 51). Without faith, humility, submission and veneration in one’s heart towards the teacher, there cannot be any growth in him. Vivekananda suggested,

“Worship your Guru as God, but do not obey him blindly. Love him all you will, but think for yourself”. (Pp.85-86)

The teacher must throw his whole force into the tendency of the thought. Without real sympathy, he can never teach well at all. According to Swami Vivekananda, “a true teacher is one who can immediately come down to the level of the student and transfer his soul to the student’s soul and see through and understand through his mind. Such a teacher an really teach and none else” (p.183) The great emphasis that Vivekananda laid in his teachings on education was the prime importance of taking to the masses and particularly to the rural masses. His heart ached to think of the condition of the poor in India. So he said:

“Our great national sin is the neglect of the masses and that is the cause of our downfall. No amount of politics would be of any avail until the masses in India are once more well-educated, well-fed and well-cared for” (pp.222-23)

The chief cause of India’s ruin has been the monopolishing of the whole education and intelligence of the land among a handful of men. The only service to be done for the lower classes in India is to give them education to develop their individuality. He said,

“If the mountain does not come to Mohammed, Mohammed must go to the Mountain; if the poor boy cannot come to education, education must go to him”. (p.363)

There are thousands of simple-minded self-sacrificing sannyasins in India going from village to village, teaching religion. If some of them can be organized as teachers of secular things also, they will go from place to place, from door to door, not only preaching but also teaching. Truly speaking, Vivekananda had the power to make the listener understand him. “People who came within his circle become inspired with his ideas and are overwhelmed by him”. (Muthukumarau, 138).

Though his whole life was spent in an unparalled flow of intense activity, Vivekananda was basically a scholar who loved to study and mediate. He felt so deeply that India must become dynamic and effect the conquest of the world through her



spirituality. He was a highly emotional being. Whatever he undertook had behind it not only his intellectual reasoning and his spiritual insight but also the entire force of his emotional strength. As Swami Vivekananda pointed out, “whatever he would think or feel, he would do so with wonderful vehemence and intensity. And this whole-souledness was another marked feature of Swamiji’s life”. The Swami advocated strength and fearlessness. ‘Fear not’ he exhorted. Fearlessness frees one from the fetters of narrow religious dogmas and parochialism.

No doubt, Vivekananda played a great role in preparing the ground for the politics of independence and giving the country a new political ideology through his re-interpretation of Vedanta and the Hindu religion and his concern for the masses and their problems. The triumph of his spiritual mission to the west, his success in placing Vedanta on the world map and winning the respect of Americans and Englishmen when his country was still a British colony, all acted as a tonic on his countrymen and helped to restore their self-respect and revived their confidence in India’s national destiny. The fiery patriotism that was so closely interwined with his religious preaching of practical Vedanta undoubtedly stimulated patriotic fervor among the youth of India and he became a symbol of national pride. In fact, Vivekananda was politically far ahead of his time. V.K. R.V. Rao said,

“In my view, the ideas that he propounded, which were politically revolutionary for the India of his times had a tremendous influence on subsequent political thinking and action in India and embraced within its sphere the mass – dynamism of Gandhi and the socialistic ideas of Nehru. Though not in politics, he did exert a visible influence on the political development in his country and the modern India that has emerged from this development” (p.236).

To Vivekananda, India did not just mean either a geographical entity or a haven of opportunity for the elite. He took pride in the country inheritance from the past. To him, the country meant the people and the people meant the masses. Removal of poverty removal of illiteracy, restoration of human dignity freedom from fear, availability of secular and spiritual knowledge to all irrespective of the caste in which they were born, the class to which they belonged, and the ending of all monopolies, whether religious or economic or intellectual, or social or cultural or political – all these formed a part of what he derived from the practical Vedanta. He was not a revolutionary in the sense of one who wanted to destroy the past and build an entirely new future. He was essentially a believer in the power of the spirit that alone can give the fuel for the successful operation of institutions or legislation and the strength and purity of individual character that alone can give life and efficiency to the building up of a new society. What the country needs is more of practice and less of professions, more of his practical Vedanta and less of its abstract philosophy and more of religion and less of religiosity. As Vivekananda used to say “one ounce of practice” is worth 20,000 tons of big talk”.

In India, religious life forms the centre, the key note of the whole music of national life. In fact, it is the very religion that Vivekananda strove to reform. What he wanted was a reform of religion and the integration of this reformed religion with the whole of life. He held the firm belief that material development and spiritual development must proceed side by side and told his disciples to be immensely practical and at the same time to acquire deep spiritual knowledge. In his words, India may progress in approaching the Western world in respect of power, science, technology and material development, but she will not reach the goal of a harmonious and happy nation unless she holds fast to religion, understanding it as spirituality that calls for universal love and service. What the country needs today is practical Vedanta or Vedantic socialism. Given the spiritual base, all our efforts at development and modernization will yield rich dividends in terms not only of material comforts and intellectual satisfaction, but also in terms of peace, harmony and happiness. Therefore, to make a great future of India the whole secret lies in organization, accumulation of power, co-ordination of wills. This is what Vivekananda gave to Indian people as his message. “In conclusion, it might be said that Vivekananda articulates. Socialism –but with an Indian voice”. (Gautam, 55)

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