

Swami Vivekananda as “The Prince of Oratory” and a Versatile Personality” Touching all Shores of Human Life: An Appraisal

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Abstract- This paper aims at nourishing the versatile personality of Swami Vivekananda as something touching all shores of human life, not only by his prophetic appearance and gesture but equally by his conversational power and also examine the most universal aspect of his literary genius because he was no ordinary personality and his words were no ordinary words, as they came from the furnace of his intellect purified by the fire of his true emotions and characterized with wonderful directness and excellent force.

Index terms- personality, directness, prophetic, universal aspect, genius, human life, versatile excellent force

INTRODUCTION

Swami Vivekananda was a versatile personality – a personality that touched all shores of human life, not only by his prophetic appearance and gesture but equally by his conversational power. This power of Swamiji is said to have disposed the most universal aspect of his genius. It was to be so because he was no ordinary personality and his words were no ordinary words. They came from the furnace of his intellect purified by the fire of his true emotions and characterized with wonderful directness and excellent force. Through his powerful words and their manifestation, even at the age of thirty, he had acquired sufficient mastery of the English language to make his speeches rhetorical without making them artificial and that is the reason why they appear to be so powerful moving. No doubt, his words do richly convey the richness and beauty of his thought and flexibility and smoothness of his expression with heart-rending messages.

Swamiji's first lecture at the Parliament of Religions made him so famous that the most distinguished

people of Chicago invited him to their homes. Everybody wanted him to be his host. After the first day's session of the Parliament, Swamiji was taken to the mansion of a millionaire and given a royal reception. The host did everything possible to make Swamiji feel comfortable, but 'Swamiji neither hankered. After name and fame, nor did he want physical comfort. So even amidst this pomp and grandeur and the spontaneous applause from the American people, Swamiji felt uncomfortable, for he could not forget how much his country men were suffering His heart continued to bleed for India and he could not sleep on the luxurious bed. Lying on the floor, he started weeping like a child the whole night and prayed thus:

“O Mother, who cares for fame when my country is bagged down in deep poverty!

We Indians are so miserably poor that millions of us die for want of a handful of rice, while here people spend money lavishly only for personal comforts! Who will raise the Indians and give them food?

O mother, tell me how I can serve them!” (P 25). Such was Swamiji's burning love for India. Swami Vivekananda was an embodiment of love for India and her people. He would inspire everybody who came in contact with him to love India. Sister

Christine writes:

“Our love for India came to birth, I think when we first heard him say the word; “India”, in that marvelous voice of his. It seems incredible that so much could have been put into one small word of five letters. There was love, passion, pride, longing, adoration, chivalry and again love

.... It had the magic power of creating love in those who heard it. Even after, India became

the land of heart's desire. Everything concerning her became of interest – became living – her people, her history, architecture, her manners and customs, her rivers, mountains, plains, her culture, her great spiritual concepts her scriptures” (P 36)

Swamiji's lectures were very popular in London. One evening he was talking about Raja-Yoga and all those present were listening with rapt attention. In one of those discourses at a western American town, Swamiji said that one who has attained absolute truth or knowledge remains the same under all circumstances; he is always calm and unruffled by things external. A few churlish cowboys heard this lecturer and decided to test him. When Swamiji went to this village to deliver a lecture, they asked him to stand on a reversed tub and address the gathering. Swamiji did as requested and then became absorbed in his subject. The cowboys meanwhile started firing from close range, the bullets whizzing past Swamiji's ears. This did not perturb Swamiji in the least. He continued his speech with as much composure as he started it. When he had finished, the cowboys surrounded him, shook hands with him and declared:

“yes Swamiji, you are absolutely genuine.

You are what you preach!” (27).

Narendra was obliged to experience both prosperity and penury in the early part of his life. He was brought up like a prince by his father who earned in plenty and spent in bounty and good causes. Deputed by the mother, the lad one day interviewed, “Father do you lay by anything for my future?”, “My boy, see your face reflected in the mirror and find out whether you require any legacy! I've bequeathed to you your inborn self-reliance”, was the prompt reply given to him by the sagacious father. Fortune has its own vagary. Following at the heels of Viswanatha Dutta's sudden and premature demise, misfortune laid hold of his family. The partners took away the major slice of the ancestral property. Bhuvanewari Matha and her two daughters and three sons were left in the lurch. Narendranath still a college student, was the eldest among the sons. The mother and the son faced the adversity with calm boldness. Poverty would not seem very cruel to those who are born and brought up in it. But even a semblance of it would be borrowing to those brought up in affluence. This Dutta family had to face starvation now and then. Narendranath had no delusion about man's life on earth”. He had

experienced weal and woe in full measure. He had rested both on a bed of roses and on a bed of thrones and his caliber was such that he remains unaffected by both” (P5). That is why he developed and showed great concern and love in fullest measure for those who passed through sufferings and problems in life. His love for humanity was so profound that when alone he often shed tears thinking about the miseries of men. The following incident happened after his first visit to America; one day Swami Turiyananda came to see him at the residence of Balaram Basu where he had been staying. Turiyananda found Swamiji walking alone on the Verandah. He was so lost in thought that he did not notice that his brother month had come to meet him. After a little while, Swamiji began to him a well-known song of Mirabai, with tears rolling down his cheeks. Then he covered his face with both hands, leaned on railings and continued to sing: ‘O, nobody understands my sorrow! He, who does not bleed, does not feel the pain!’ Narrating this incident, Swami Turiyananda later said, “His voice pierced my heart like an arrow, moving me to tears. Not knowing the cause of Swamiji's sorrow, I was very uneasy. But if soon flashed upon me that it was a tremendous universal sympathy with the suffering and the oppressed that was the cause of his mood” (P 41).

He is, no doubt, the prophet of modern Indian advocating love and harmony for humanity in all respects. Swamiji 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 him the paragon of Vedantists”. Max Muller and Paul Deussen, the famous orientalist of the nineteenth century, held him in genuine respect and affection. “His mission was both national and international. A lover of mankind, he strove to promote peace and human brotherhood on the spiritual foundation of the Vedantic Oneness of existence” (Nikhilananda in Preface v). In the course of a short life of thirty-nine years (1863-1902), of which only ten were devoted to public activities – and those, too, in the midst of acute physical suffering – he left for posterity his four classics; 1.*Jnana-yoga*, 2.*Bhakti-yoga*, 3.*Karma yoga* and 4.*Raja yoga*, all of which are outstanding treatises on Hindu philosophy and that is why Vivekananda is

requested as the patriot saint of modern India and an inspirer of her dominant national consciousness.

His very first speech drew the admiration of the people all and Sunday. O.P.Sharma rightly remarks: “His speech had performed impact on American audiences because it filled the immense void in the spiritual life of the West caused by militant rationalism and irrelevant scientific spirit” (135). The speeches as an orator made him famous out in U.S.A. but also all over the world and on his return to India, he gave inspiring messages to the people for their spiritual and social upliftment. His noble and lofty words created a new chord in every Hindu heart and infused a sense of pride and self-esteem as well as an ardent love for the motherland in the minds of the people. Establishing the superiority of Hindu spiritualism over Islam and Christianity, he suggested to the Hindus that if they would pursue the path as shown by the *Vedanta*, they would realize the soul of their religion and be able to build a glorious society. A Kendra worker comments:

“Rich with the practical Vedantic wisdom, blessed by the tutelage of Sri Ramakrishna and inspired by the ideas of Vedic Rishins, Swamiji, commenced his Odyssey. A thousand hearts wished him ‘God be-with you’! He was an ambassador without a political or expansionist mission. His only goal was to give all humanity India’s timeless message of truth and love” (P 36).

His journey around the country reinforced his faith in all that is Indian and influenced every decision he made in his later life. His well-established principle is “to spiritualize the material civilization of the world” (P 2). As an ardent lover of humanistic spiritualism”, Vivekananda’s living presence often becomes powerfully evident behind his words” (Isherwood 8). One prophetic saying of Swamiji is “I have a message to the West, as Buddha had a message to the East” (P 18). His religious idealism was to make mankind peaceful and lovable. Swami Vivekananda spoke rather obviously and aptly:

“Man has wanted to look beyond, wanted to expand himself, and all that we call progress, evolution, has been always measured by that one search, the search for human destiny, the search for God. We find that though there is nothing that has brought man more blessings than religion; yet at the same time, there is nothing that has brought him

more horror than religion. Nothing has made more for peace and love than religion; nothing has engendered fiercer hatred than religion. Nothing has made the brotherhood of man more Tangible than religion nothing has built more charitable institutions, more hospitals for men and even for animals than religion”
(Chetananda 85)

Religion is an institution of principles and dogmas. As there are many principles and dogmas regarding God in the world, so there are many religions. These religions were established to promote spiritual experience. The aim of established religions is to seek divinity and realize God through lofty principles. Swamiji claimed himself to be an advaitin – a follower of Advaita, Advaita of the Vedanta. Vedanta inculcates in the individual an inward quest. Vedanta seeks “to find out that unity which is the basis of the diversities” (Tapasyananda 193). So long as this quest is dynamic, perfection is certainly to be found out in the unity undercurrent in all the religions. Thus, it is now clear that by universal religion, Swamiji Vivekananda means a universal applicability of religious truths. If such an attitude is developed, then each religion will contribute to the well-being of man – the well-being composed of spiritual and physical development. In a word, “the core of Swamiji’s message is Advaita Vedanta or religion that looks at the entire humanity as one and which preaches spiritual identity of all created things with God or soul” (Dutta 231). To conclude, as Swami Vivekananda has the command of language, thoughts and action, he is still remembered as the “prophet of modern India and “a versatile personality” touching all shores of human life.

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