

## **SWĀMI VIVEKĀNANDA - THE REVOLUTIONARY**

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People have a general tendency to brand or fix a label on all great men who make their impact on mankind and society. We tend to regard them by instinct as spiritual leaders, patriots, hero or scientists. But it is not so easy to give a name or label against the person of the caliber of the one and only patriot monk namely Swami Vivekananda. Somehow one feels that nothing seems to describe him correctly or fittingly. Through his speeches, writings, letters and books we get different streams of vision, different figures at different times of the great and undoubtedly one of the most influential person in Indian history. His message does not stand good for one particular point of time but rather for all times, not for one particular country but for all countries, not for one single aspect of human existence but for all aspects of human life. Let us examine some of the key issues which Swami VivekĀnanda has discussed in detail.

1. Swāmiji's concern for secular problems: Although numerous saints and leaders of various religions have been produced by India it would be very difficult to detect in them messages which have an appreciation for the present day problems of life and a heart that bleeds out for the suffering millions of India as we find throughout the speeches and writings of Swāmi VivekĀnanda. There are times where he even subordinates religion to other interests of life. Swamiji says that at the present time there are men who give up the world to

help their own salvation. Throw away everything, even your own salvation, and go and help others... Give up this little life of yours. What matters if you die of starvation, you and I and thousands like us, so long as this nation lives? The nation is sinking, the curse of unnumbered millions is on our heads...Here is the greatest of all works, here are the sinking millions...first bread and then religion. We stuff them too much with religion, when the poor fellows have been starving. Any number of such passages can be quoted which reflects the advanced views of Swāmi Vivekānanda on secular problems. Swāmiji himself says: "I do not believe in reform, I believe in growth". This single line contains the gist of the teachings of Swami Vivekānanda. The next important issue that Swami Vivekānanda discusses is with reference to his novel understanding on Vedānta and his approach to patriotism.

2. Swāmi Vivekānanda on Vedanta and Patriotism: According to Swāmiji the energy, power and force to transform both the individual and the society must come from within. Swāmiji again points out the fact that the root cause of all our failures and evils is the lack of physical strength and faith. "Our young men must be strong first of all. Religion will come afterwards" says Swāmiji. Again Swāmiji quickly adds: "You will understand the Gita better with your biceps, your muscles, a little stronger". Only with strength comes the faith and ability in us to do great things says Swāmi Vivekānanda. This faith and strength comes from the Upaniṣhads or the Vedānta which contains the rich heritage of our ancient philosophy. Each one of us must believe that 'I am the soul' which would give him the much needed strength and faith. These noble teachings of the Vedānta must form the basis of man's everyday life. He must also be careful to lead a life in accordance with the principles and tenets of the Vedānta and

thereby to make his life more moral and meaningful. Swāmiji was extremely moved by the misery of the masses. His heart bled for the poor. He was so proud of the rich and the glorious past of India and was also sure that India had a bright future ahead of it. This was the mood in which he told his countrymen in the year 1897: "For the next fifty years, this alone shall be our keynote- this, our great Mother India. Let all other vain gods disappear for that time from our minds. This is the only god that is awake... All other gods are sleeping" . Seeking no one's help and relying on nobody, Swāmiji with his firm conviction and self-confidence exhorted the people to stir themselves to the task of removing poverty, spreading education, nullifying social injustices and so on. Another important concern of Swāmi Vivekānanda is expressed in the form of service to mankind. Unlike others he not only preached but also practiced his motto in life which was "Service to Man is Service to God".

3. Service to man is service to God: As in the case of charity so also religion begins at home. At Belur in a sacred place where his master Sri Rāmakrishna revealed his gospel, Swami Vivekānanda established a math to provide men with the means to get their own liberation, so that they might contribute for that betterment of the world and of themselves. This betterment should start from the most humblest and simple persons and therefore Swāmiji had uppermost in his mind the Daridra Nārāyaṇa-the God in poor, 'the only God that exists, the only God in whom I believed, my God the miserable, my God the poor of all races. This conception of God gave a new shape to the spirit of the service. As told by Sri Rāmakrishna, religion does not stand for empty stomachs. Mere feeding of the poor and the masses is not enough; on the other hand they must be taught to work and earn a living for themselves. 'Him I call a Mahātman

whose heart bleeds for the poor', remarked Swāmi Vivekānanda. Man is the greatest symbol of God and his worship the highest form of worship and this message of the Swāmi had a tremendous impact throughout the whole of mankind. Swāmi Vivekānanda as a leader of women regeneration also had a great concern for women upliftment which is expressed in the following passages.

4. Swāmiji as a leader of women regeneration: "In India", said Swāmiji, "there are two great evils: Trampling on the women, and grinding the poor through caste restrictions." He therefore held that the "uplift of the women, the awakening of the masses, must come first, and then only can any real good come about for the country, for India." . He strongly emphasized the need to treat women on par with men if the country is to make any progress at all. " We are horrible sinners, and our degradation is due to our calling women 'despicable worms', 'gateways to hell', and so forth. Goodness gracious! There is all the difference between Heaven and Hell" , pours out Swāmiji. Swāmiji's conception of equality among men and women was grounded on the Vedantic doctrine of the concept of divinity of man. Swāmiji always believed in the power and purity of Indian womanhood. This he learnt from his master, Sri Rāmākṛishna, who transformed his wife, a simple illiterate, village girl, Saradamani into a spiritual aspirant for the purpose of divine realization. Swāmiji was also influenced by his own guru who glorified his own wife, as a Divine Mother. This is one of the main reasons why Swāmiji first started a spiritual resurgence centre for women immediately after the passing away of Sri Rāmākṛishna. Swāmi Vivekānanda praised Indian women of their various achievements as leaders in various fields of life. Swāmiji says: "Women in statesmanship, managing territories, governing countries, even making war, have proved

themselves equal to men, if not superior. In India I have no doubt of that. Whenever they have had the opportunity, they have proved that they have as much ability as men, with this advantage- that they seldom degenerate. They keep to the moral standard, which is innate in their nature..." . Women should be worshipped as the symbol of chastity. In the eyes of Swāmiji the ideal woman was always in the form of Sita. Ideal women of future should be physically strong, intellectually vigorous, socially dynamic and beyond all these, must be spiritually great. At the thousand Island Park in America during the year 1985 Swāmiji prophesied: "At the present time God should be worshiped as 'Mother', the Infinite Energy. This will lead to purity and tremendous energy will come here in America... We have to become Vedāntists and live this great thought, the masses must get it, and only America can this be done... The new cycle must see the masses living Vedānta, and this will have to come through women." Swāmiji conceived liberty or freedom as an important condition for women's growth and liberation. "Liberty is the first condition of growth. It is wrong, a thousand times wrong, if any one of you dares to say, 'I will work out the salvations of this women or child '. I am asked again and again, what I think of the widow problem and what I think of the woman question. Let me answer once for all-Am I a widow, that you ask me that nonsense? Am I a woman, that you ask me that question again and again? Are you the Lord God that you should rule over every widow and every woman? Hands off: They will solve their own problems." Swāmiji was fully aware of the poor and backward condition of women and he ascribed it mainly due to the lack of education. Education was also one of the main concerns of Swāmi Vivekānanda and he stressed the need of education for all people irrespective of their caste, creed or colour.

5. Swāmi Vivekananda on Education: According to Swāmiji “Education is not the amount of information that is put into your brain and runs riot there, undigested, all your life. We must have life-building, man-making, character-making assimilation of ideas. If you have assimilated five ideas and made them your and character, you have more education than any man who has got by heart a whole library.” He opposed the then existing system of education on the grounds that it was not a man-making education, though it had some good points. “I look upon religion as the inner most core of education. Mind, I do not mean my own or anybody else’s opinion about religion” asserts Swāmi Vivekānanda. He always stressed on the comprehensive nature of education which aimed at character-building, physical culture, development of arts, knowledge of the humanities along with Indian culture and finally scientific and technological training. He also pointed out the need and importance of a good teacher for acquiring good education. Women education for Swāmiji should lay special emphasis on chastity and fearlessness. Swāmiji conceived an ideal women education centre in the form of math where a school would also be attached to it. Subjects covered would be religious scriptures, literature including both Sanskrit and English would also be taught. Apart from these Swāmiji also considered sewing, cooking, domestic work and upbringing of children as subjects that were important for women. Meditation along with worship would also form a daily aspect of every student’s life. Swāmiji considered knowledge as something that comes out of its own. The whole idea of education was summed up by Swāmiji as “the manifestation of perfection in man”. Swāmi Vivekananda was a man of modern ideas and vision. He strongly opposed and fought against the existence of caste system, its cruelty and consequences in the society.

6. Swāmiji on caste system: As regards to caste system Swāmiji points out that it was the social groupings which formed the basis of Indian caste system. According to Swāmi Vivekānanda: “Caste is a natural order; I can perform one duty in social life, and you another; you can govern a country and I can mend a pair of old shoes, but that is no reason why you are greater than I, for, can you mend my shoes? Can I govern the country? I am clever in mending shoes, you are clever in reading the Vedas, but that is no reason why you should trample on my head”. The original idea of caste or Jati contained the idea of the freedom of the individual to express his nature. “... the modern rigid system of caste distinctions, involving inequality, is very different from its old flexible form, and this transformation is the cause of the down fall of India” , opines Swāmiji. He blames the priests who are solely responsible for it. “It is in the books written by the priests that madness like that of caste are to be found; and not in books revealed from God” , declares Swāmi Vivekānanda. Caste is nothing but a crystallized social institution. It is the greatest factor which divides and causes inequality among people. It is the biggest barrier to any nation’s progress. Swāmiji always hoped that one day or the other this caste system would crumble and come to an end. Swāmi Vivekānanda says that from the time of the Upanishads down to the present day, nearly all our great Teachers have wanted to break through the barriers of caste, i.e., caste in its degenerated stat, not the original system. What little good you see in the present caste clings to it from the original caste, which was the most glorious social institution . Swamiji wanted a new and modern classification of the castes. He strongly emphasized the need for total restructuring of the caste system. Swāmiji says “Castes should not go; but, should only be readjusted- accordingly. Within the old structure, is to be found

life enough for the re-building of two hundred thousand new ones. It is sheer nonsense to desire the abolition of caste. The new method is- evolution of the old". Swāmiji was also vehemently against untouchability which was very much prevalent in South India. Swāmiji attacks the defenders of untouchability in his very own unique and inimitable style. "Do you think our religion is worth the name? Ours is only Don't Touchism, only 'touch me not, touch me not'. Good Heavens: A country, the big leaders of which have for the last two thousand years been only discussing whether to take food with the right hand or the left, whether to take water from the right side or the left-if such a country does not go to ruins, what other will?... A country, where millions of people live on the flower of the Mohua plant, and a million or two of Sadhus, and a hundred million or so of Brahmanas suck the blood of these poor people, without even the least effort for their amelioration- Is that a country or a hell? Is that a Religion or the Devil's dance?" . Thus we can see how Swāmiji sought to revive the whole and the quintessential spirit of Hinduism after rooting out the evils and outgrowths that practically tried to kill it. Swāmi Vivekānanda acted as a bridge between the East and the West and at the same time between the old and the new which is explained in a significant way as under.

7. Synthesis between the Old and the New – the East and the West: The greatest role played or the contribution of Swāmi Vivekānanda lies in bringing about a revolution as well as an evolution of Modern India. He neither totally discarded the old nor denied the merit of the new, but instead pointed out the synthesis between the two. On the one hand he stressed the need for overall development of the Indians by imbibing both the spiritual aspect of ancient India on the one hand and the material culture of the West on the other. He



also considered the same combination as essentially necessary for the West. To put it in Swāmi Vivekānanda's words: "We require the knowledge of science and technology as much or badly as the West needs the spiritual culture". It is the divorce between the two which has mainly led to the downfall of our country. Swāmiji's prophecy has also a great moral value and a treasure for us. For the first time in the history of mankind it showed to us that we Indians need not be affected whatsoever even with an aorta of inferiority complex with regards to the Western civilization. If the Western civilization has superiority to Indian culture in material progress and may help India into attain the same, India in return offers something without which the material greatness of the West will soon fade away. Therefore, strictly speaking, it is only a matter of give and take policy whereby India can hold her head high before the whole world as she is in no way inferior to the West in the scale of real values.

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