

**(RE)PRESENTING THE AURA OF SWAMIJI: THE SCHEMA OF
SPIRITUAL HUMANISM IN SWAMI VIVEKANANDA**

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Abstract

The colonial period in the halcyon days of the British Raj was a confluence of pressures and pulls of forces of self and others, fashioning the colony and the colonized. In order to consolidate themselves, the colonizers supported and even exploited the acerbic fissures caused by the assertion of various religious, regional and linguistic identities in the colony. The need for a Renaissance was urgently felt. Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902) was such a messiah who sounded the clarion call for galvanizing the nationalistic spirit of India in the throes of degeneracy. Swamiji wanted to revitalize the nation by strengthening its bloodstream which he pointed out to be spirituality. His comprehensiveness of vision and universality of thought was reflected in his belief that India had within herself the intellectual means to her own emancipation.

In Swami Vivekananda the universal spirit found a loving, dynamic and an all-encompassing expression which is rarely to be found elsewhere. He saw the divine self of man and looked upon the human form as the very symbol of Divinity. The erstwhile Hindu society and its practices had touched an all-time low with its ostentations, polytheism, fragmentations, sectarianism, casteism, ritualism, superstitions, ignorance and outworn customs – all in the name of religion. Reforms, leaving the formal behavioural arena, entered the putative. A Renaissance was in the offing. Vivekananda was the exemplary champion of Renaissance, whereby he sought to free society from the thralldom of idolatry and caste worship. His brevity became inseparable from colonial expediency. His halo of reform fought the devil of delusion tirelessly. He was free from dogmatism and sectarian exclusiveness. A thorough mystic, he dealt with Hinduism as the grand heritage of India, championed the cause of ancient Hindu religion and its sublime culture and stove tirelessly against the belligerent Western notions of nationalism (Rolland 103).

As a mystic, spiritualism was the be-all and end-all of Swamiji. Spiritual integration of the world through the Advaita philosophy of Vedanta was the core of Vivekananda's spiritualism. Vivekananda realized the supreme truth that as the life-force of India lies in its spiritualism, nothing else but the reconnaissance of spiritualism would resurrect India nationally. Spiritualism alone would restore her national vigour against the depravities of foreign rule. For

him, spirituality was the cultivation of the great ideals embodied in the Gita and the Upanishads, thereby effecting a notion of universal consonance where stymied practices of don't-touchisms and bigoted caste rules found no accord. For propagating this principle of universal unity, he resorted to Advaita Vedanta or the philosophy of non-duality of God and the universe and non-duality of all individual entities (Bhuyan 83). In explaining the Advaita philosophy he made the assertion of one man, one God, one religion and one universe, the centre of which is Brahma- the Absolute, the source of all existence for both living and non- living. He believed in such unity or oneness of the universe. Imbuing the Vedantic philosophy from his spiritual preceptor, Shri Ramkrishna Paramhansa, he believed that "spirituality is the soul of India. Its enhancement has always been the sure way to greatness and its erosion, the way to national suicide" (Vivekananda 3: 450). The religion and philosophy of Vedanta, which Vivekananda expounded, contains the essentials of all the religions of the world. Vedanta is the common basis of many faiths and religious systems in as much as it dwells on the fundamental truths that underlie the different religious doctrine and practices. It teaches not one particular aspect or concept of God, but several. To his spiritual vision, man's real Self is ever pure, free, immortal and divine. The same Supreme Being dwells within each psychophysical organism as the conscious self more or less manifests. The One Infinite Self is apparently divided into countless individual selves. Of all the living creatures, man alone is capable of realizing his essential identity with the Divinity and his unity with all living creatures. Only the realization of spiritual oneness with all can develop deep universal love. Vedantist philosophy is imbued with the conscious knowledge that all is one spirit. There is only one self in the universe- the rest are all manifestations. Vivekananda believed:

Man stands on the glory of his own soul, the infinite, the eternal and the deathless-that soul which no instruments can pierce, which no air can dry, nor fire burn, nor water melt, the infinite, the birthless, the deathless, without beginning and without end, before whose magnitude the suns and the moons and all their systems appear like drops in the ocean, before whose glory the space melts away into nothingness and time vanishes into non-existence. This glorious soul we must believe in. (3: 422)

What led Vivekananda to propagate the Vedantic truth was his unbounded compassion for one and all down to the lowest. Though the masses of India were stooped in debauchery, depravity, poverty, illiteracy and passivity yet her spiritual ardour was intact, Vivekananda believed. He knew that spiritual regeneration of the world depended on the spiritual regeneration of India which would further his plan to reconstruct humanity. Spirituality abnegated materiality; Vivekananda believed that tremendous purity and tremendous renunciation was a secret of spirituality. Nothing was to be gained except by sacrifice. For this, Vivekananda propagated the practise of meditation. Vivekananda believed that "There is an eternal fountain of spirituality in our scriptures, and nowhere on earth, except in this land of renunciation, do we find such noble examples of practical spirituality" (3: 88).

Swamiji represented ancient divine wisdom, medieval devotion and modern rationalism. For him, "the Indian mind is first religious, then anything else" (Vivekananda 2: 53). For Vivekananda, Advaita philosophy was the crown jewel of all spiritual thoughts. He believed that unless man became selfless and non- covetous, he couldn't understand the essence of religion. Religion is a process of Being and Becoming, not of believing. The central truth of religion is the

divinity of man. The essence of the Vedas is in the fact that every being was divine, was God; the same Spirit manifested through different planes. For Vivekananda, the Vedas were the eternal laws living in every soul. He deigned to believe that our power is already ours, our salvation is already within us; man has to believe in it, believe in the possibility of everybody. That there is the same possibility in the lowest man as there is in the Budhdha is what constitutes the doctrine of Atman, followed by Vivekananda. He staunchly believed that “The secret of Advaita is: Believe in yourselves first, and then believe in anything else” (3: 255). Man is individual in being universal and not in being particular. Vivekananda deemed the soul to be devoid of sex, caste or imperfections. Every soul is infinite, everyone has “this infinite power and the infinite purity of everything” – that led him to believe that “Religion is the manifestation of divinity already in man” (4: 214). The soul of man, devoid of beginning or end, birth or death, is infinite, free and divine. Vivekananda believed that the only universal religion possible in the world is the amity of religions; he abnegated the trappings of bigoted religious factions and practices. Once religion got rid of all its external formalities, the knowledge of the infinity of man’s soul remained. To Vivekananda, this knowledge was the finding of unity in diversity. To realize infinity of self is to accomplish unity in diversity. Unity is the means to attaining knowledge; diversity incurs ignorance. Spiritual unity was vouched to be the ultimate ground of all diversity. Swamiji re-iterated “The whole universe is a play of unity in variety, and of variety in unity. The whole universe is a play of differentiation and oneness; the whole universe is a play of finite in the Infinite” (1: 433).

Swamiji, always full of tautological remembrances, was as critical of his Hindu self as he was of the modern West. His self-criticism did not substantially differ from the Western perception of us. Striving tirelessly for the reawakening and resurrection of the Indian masses held fast by poverty, priestcraft and tyranny, Swamiji wanted to purge Hinduism of its evils. He clearly noted the presence of a spiritual tradition through our millennium- old degradation and decrepitude. Being a proud militant Hindu, he was merciless in criticizing the hypocritical priests and pundits who interfered (to the misery of millions of human beings) in every social perspective. For Swamiji, this was a terrible mistake as he thought religion had no business to formulate social laws and insist upon the difference between beings; religion was to obliterate all such fiction and monstrosities (Nikhilananda 52). He wanted to see a society in which the rigid, fossilized form of caste should be liberated so that man might occupy his appropriate role in society. The Hindu orthodoxy stood bewildered as Swamiji wielded his halo of reform. Swamiji upheld the notion of the Brahman, “the Brahman being the ideal of humanity” (Vivekananda 5: 214). It was the duty of the Brahman to work for the salvation of the rest of mankind. Swamiji abhorred the millennia-old ogre of bigoted caste practices and prejudices. The least show of originality was stifled. Religion was not to be found in the trappings of casteist prejudices and idolatry, as Vivekananda opined; “religion is here and now, in this present life” (3: 87). Being of one mind was the secret of society. The super-arrogated excellence of birth of any caste in India was only a myth; Swamiji preferred a caste of purity, culture and self-sacrifice. Such was his aura.

Swamiji was an apostle of strength. He had the capacity to appreciate greatness in any form. He advocated and strove tirelessly for freedom of individuals, a right to equality and a religion of strength and fearlessness. To him, fear was a cause of sin, degradation, misery and annihilation. Ignorance of one’s own nature and potentialities of divinity incurred fear. Swamiji

was vehemently against it. He believed strength lay in goodness, in purity of actions, thoughts, intentions and practices.

To Swamiji the knowledge of God was without beginning or end. As a knower of Brahman, he lived on both the transcendental and normal planes. He believed in the depthless creative energy which goes on back and forth in a ceaselessly wave-like motion through eternity. He maintained, “just as creation is infinite and eternal, without beginning and without end, so is the knowledge of God without beginning and without end” (Vivekananda 5: 189). Closely allied to this vision of knowledge is his view of love. Love for oneself, for humanity, for the varied manifestations of divinity in man was what appealed to Vivekananda most of all. He believed, “to love because it is the nature of love to love is undeniably the highest and most unselfish manifestation of love that may be seen in the world” (5: 74). His all-embracing love was the spontaneous expression of spiritual enlightenment in the highest sense. He believed only love had the power to extricate man from the throes of annihilation. The pinnacle of ever-ready and ever-willing sacrifice had to be scaled in order to be able to love humanity selflessly and devotedly, as Swami Vivekananda had done.

Nation- building and character-building through educational reconstruction was the foremost concern of Vivekananda. He claimed that one must have life-building, man-making, character-forming assimilation of ideas. Believing education to be the manifestation of divinity vested in man, Swamiji wanted an education by which character is formed, strength of mind is increased, intellect is expanded and one is able to stand on one’s feet:

“Education, education, education alone!” (Vivekananda 4: 483).

Education would help the common masses to be equipped for a struggle with life. Education would inculcate a strength of character and a spirit of philanthropy which would reveal the greater truths of religion to man. It was to be an education of freedom, in which the inclinations of the individual were given a chance for development. To be a ‘character,’ Vivekananda asserts, “Man must be given food, education and spirituality” (2: 89). He emphasized the urgent need for India to assimilate the spirit of modern science, develop technical efficiency and practical skills and, through these, build up a healthy and progressive body-politic. To him, “the end of all education, all training should be man-making. The end and aim of all training is to make man grow” (2: 15). This vision of Vivekananda was prefigured by his concern for the poor, the downtrodden, the disenfranchised. It was for the poor that he coined the phrase “Daridra Narayana” – God in the poor – and emphasized that only by education could the masses come to know their rights and their heritage (Vivekananda vol.2). The best service that could be done for the deprived was to educate them, develop their lost individuality and sense of self. Education was deemed to be the light that dispelled the gloom and moral turpitude and made life conducive to holistic thoughts and actions. Through education came faith in one’s own self and capabilities; man could derive strength of character by believing in his potentiality for divinity. Moral, spiritual and physical strength to do the right deed was of paramount importance to him. He vehemently excoriated its abuse. He realized that “Slaves want power to make slaves” (3: 488). He considered weakness and lack of moral fibre the bitterest enemy of mankind, maintaining that “strength is life, weakness is death. Strength is felicity, life eternal, immortal; weakness is constant strain and misery: weakness is death” (1: 37). He propounded that humanity must move as one body in an orderly progression, in which every individual, every nation, will have a distinctive role to play. The goal of civilization cannot be different from the goal of

mankind. Tyranny over the minority is the worst one can see, believed Vivekananda. In the deprived and downtrodden, he infused hope, courage, faith and belief in oneself; into the rich he injected a feeling of compassion, sympathy and responsibility for the masses.

Closely allied to his vision of education as the means of edification of the society is his notion of freedom-of thought, expressions, actions. His vision encompassed spiritual as well as social, political and individual freedom. Spiritual freedom was of primal importance to Vivekananda. The search for the temporal regulated by ethical principle leads to the search for the eternal regulated by spiritual idealism. With the development of spiritual consciousness i.e. with the growing awareness of the true nature of the Self, an individual's moral and rational nature is bound to develop. And it is his moral and rational nature brought to fruition by the emancipation of his consciousness that make his cultural growth, his social interactions and his material well-being sound and secure. Vivekananda believed emancipation of one's consciousness would lead him to a spiritual unity, the one goal of all human knowledge. Vivekananda considered society as a divine, holistic institution, an effectual means of dispensing justice and morality. He maintained "That society is the greatest where the highest truths become practical. That is my opinion and if the society is not fit for the highest truths, make it so, and the sooner the better" (Vivekananda 2: 85). Freedom from the millennia-old shackles of moribund casteist prejudices and deplorable inequalities persistent in all the factions of the society was the need of the hour. Swamiji vehemently asserted, "The whole life of society is the assertion of that one principle of freedom" (2: 126). Vivekananda was of the view that political freedom preceded spiritual freedom which led to the reconnaissance of other types of freedom. Being thoroughly cognisant of the benevolence of the British rule, the struggle for independence was not on his itinerary. His was a programme of practical and constructive nationalism which could be worked out without striving for the political freedom of the country. Swamiji's nationalism being assimilative and synthetic in character, breathes the spirit of universalism; this nationalism is based on the lofty Vedantic ideal of non-attachment, non-covetousness and non-possessiveness. Vivekananda believed that freedom is indispensable for spiritual realization of man and of his personality. His faith in the inherent individual freedom is the bedrock upon which his defence of equal rights and opportunities for individuals for their holistic growth rests. His concept of individual freedom and equality of rights is based upon democratic principles which, in turn, evidences his universal bent of mind. For the wheels of the society to run smoothly, man must cultivate an assimilative outlook and identify himself with others by which social freedom will be propagated. Freedom was indispensable to political and social progresses (Badrinath 76). To him, freedom is the divine endowment, bestowed upon man because of his divine potentiality. Believing in this grand concept of freedom of man and all other forms of life he declared, "Freedom is the goal of all the noblest aspirations of mankind" (4: 434). Man's own cognisance of his freedom was what mattered most to him. According to him, man is the final manifestation of passion for freedom. This passion is what sustains him to believe in the spiritual oneness of his existence. This advocacy of the passion for freedom was also imbricated in the abject, inferior and miserable position in the orthodox Hindu society women had come to occupy. Swamiji venerated women, their sacrifices, their selflessness and their self-absolving devotion towards all. Swamiji emphasized that India's salvation depended on the sacrifice and enlightenment of her women. It was Vivekananda's contention that a woman could strive constructively for edifying the society morally, politically and spiritually.

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None other than Swamiji himself could pay a fitting tribute to his enigma of a personality. In his words, “It is the man of strong will that throws, as it were, a halo around him and brings all other people to the same state of vibration as he has in his own mind. Such gigantic men do appear. And what is the idea? When a powerful individual appears, his personality infuses his thoughts into us and many of us come to have the same thoughts and thus we become powerful” (Vivekananda 3: 367). Indeed we do.

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