

SWAMI VIVEKANANDA THE FLAVOUR OF INDIA

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Introduction

My dear youth, the Brain of India! It is a matter of great privilege and deep satisfaction for me to share the thoughts of my master with the youth of our country. I always tell that only on that day I live when I have an opportunity to share his thoughts with the people, especially the youth. So, today is a special day in my life, because I am addressing a special gathering. IIT students are supposed to be the cream of the Indian youth and I am really enchanted to know that there is a Vivekananda Study Circle here and so many of you are being guided by great scholars like Swami Brahmeshanandaji Maharaj. God bless you all. I don't know where I should start.

To condense Swami Vivekananda into an hour's lecture is a sin, I would say. Still, instead of going into his wonderful messages, which you can read everywhere, I will just share with you some of my own meditations on my Master and what I might get, out of his words. That would be more relevant because, when you start meditating on him, you may also get much clearer and better visions, especially since most of you are more brainy than I am. I am only a botanist, agriculturist and a woman. Yet, I am proud to be a woman and I always pray to God, that in all my Janmas, I should become only a woman. Being a woman, there is a short cut to divinity, which I have discovered from my own life. Swami Brahmeshanandaji is always enchanted when I say that and asks me to write about it.

The Prelude

Last year, sometime in July, I had an occasion to address the students who came from Canadian Universities, to our Cochin University. I talked to them about Hinduism in Kerala but when the lecture was over some of them came to me and said, "we would like to talk to you again." I told them they were welcome to do so. They said, "Are you aware that the 21st century is going to be a century of spiritual tourism?" I replied, "Yes, because all our greater masters have predicted that the West will have to come to India, sooner than later.

And the time is up for you, and you will have to come here. "There was one girl among them, her name was Eva. She said, "Madam, we, the youth of the West, are fed up of our

consumerist culture. There is such a bad odour emanating from it. We are looking for deeper, more fulfilling experiences in our life. We want that flavour of India. So, we are all going to come here. It is not like our coming here in previous years, seeking pleasure. This time we are coming to enjoy a deeper fragrance of India." Then, so sincerely, she caught hold of my hand and said, "Tell me something about that rare flavour of India. What is it that marks India out from the rest of the world?"

India's Unique Flavour

I said, "My dear daughter, you have asked a very important question. Then I prayed to Swamiji that I should be able to give her the right answer. Then, I told her, that there are two facets to this issue. One, that they have been brought up in a culture which is different from the rest of the world and that they have grown up in Dvaitabhava, that is duality. But, we in India, in spite of all our pretensions towards communism or capitalism or socialism or any other ?ism?, somewhere deep within us, know that there is unity in diversity. Somewhere, we know deep within us, there is a Jivaatma here and it is the same: "Hridesaarjuna Drishtathi Brahmayam Sarva bhoothaani Indrarooddani maya" It is the same, which resides in us everything. Human beings, animals, plants, even this non-living poor little mic. Everywhere it is there. Moreover, you are all students of science. The West has found this unity, we cannot say that we alone know that. They have found out, since Einstein formulated his famous equation $E=mc^2$, we all know that they are on the path of that great discovery of unity. What to call it, how to organise it, is a matter of scientific enquiry. But, where do you go after that? There seems to be a blind alley. But, we in India, did not stop with that. "Kashchid Dheeraha", the Upanishads say. When they found this Unity in Diversity, outside, they knew they are very near the truth. Let us go deeper, they went inside. Swami Vivekananda says in one of his lectures, "If somebody wants to

explore the history of India, they should look for this. When the rest of the world looked outside, what prompted the Indian mind to look within for the truth? There lies our glory. The moment of glory, when they started looking inside eliminating, "Mano Buddhi Ahankaara Chittaani naaham". Not this, not this, "Neti Neti Vachanair Nigama Avochu." They found suddenly that spark of truth within. When they found that, they did not stop, but meditated further on that truth and then they found that it is the same truth that is manifest everywhere. The whole universe is nothing but an expression of that One truth. And what did they do, did they create an atom bomb out of it to destroy their enemies? No. They cried out, "Shrunvanthu Viswe Amrithasya Putraha, Aye Dhamaani Divyanithasthu Vedahametham Purusham Mahaantam Adityavarnam Tamasah Parastaat Thameva vidhidva Atimrityumedhi Naanya Pantha Vidyathe Ayanaya." So, wonderful. We usually think we are all sinners. We think we are nobodies. Dr. Ananth said just a while ago, "Are you afraid? You have no confidence in yourself?" Why Amrithasya Putraha (Children of Immortality), you have a wonderful heritage behind you. This wonderful truth hidden within you. There is a wonderful power in your muscles and strength, everywhere within you. Then, why this frustration? Why this suicidal tendency? Why this depression?

Understand your self. "Athimrityumedi", the world is afraid today. It has nothing to offer but death. What can you do? Go to a super bazaar in America, hundred and odd types of bread, five hundred types of something else, but how long can all this satisfy you? What more can you eat? Sometimes, when you go to the super market it is really as that girl said, the

stench of consumerism is all around you. You won't be able to stay there. You want to come here, so that the fragrance of our forest, the green undulating bhoomi here, rivers gurgling down, it is wonderful. So, I told her, "Look, this is our strength. You know how to find out the unity in diversity, but we have taken one step further. That is the real quantum leap which we have taken from unity to Poornatha, the wholesomeness, "Poornamadah, Poornamidam", we have heard it. That perfection, a step down from the intellectual realisation of the unity, and then jump on to that perfection within, for that you'll have to come here. The superfine technology by which Truth can become part of you and you can become part of the truth that's perfect. That has been India's great contribution to the world thought and culture. That is still with us. She was very happy but also pointed out that when they come here seeking all this but find out that the youth here know nothing about it; what a tragedy! They don't know how to give us a good answer. They know nothing of this fragrance of India. That is why I said, it is deeply satisfying to be amidst you, you should know the fragrance of India. You can't read Vivekananda without getting that fragrance. He was a condensed India. When you touch Vivekananda, your understanding of religion, of education, your understanding of life itself changes. Remember Sri Krishna's word: "Svalpamavapyasya Dharmasya Traayato Mahato Bhayaat." That is the magic message with which he touched everybody who came in contact with him.

Glimpses from Swami Vivekananda's life

Now, a few glimpses of his life. I always remember, when he went to Maharshi Debendranath Tagore and asked him, "Have you seen God?" he said, "Oh Naren, you have the eyes of a Yogi". I have meditated on that. Why did he say that? Yogi's eyes? What is there in these yogi's eyes? It took me sometime, a yogi can see the world as one, as one's own, without the barrier of a separation in mind and this came true when Swamiji stood on the platform of the Chicago Parliament of religion, looked at the 7000 strong audience before him, people of all nationalities, communities, religions, spiritual traditions but never found them as separate from him. He considered them as a part of his own family. And the truth of Debanadranath's words. Flowed out through him, "Sisters and brothers of America". In fact Swamiji's message stopped there. For me, these five words are Swami Vivekananda's message. Everything what he did later was only a

commentary on these five words. How he among all people who were present there who were usually addressed as ladies and gentlemen, how could he use these words. What was there in these words? What did it show? It was a revelation of truth. That the whole universe is one, the solidarity of the existence where we are all inter-related, independent. How can I see you as different? I, through my subtle Yogi eyes am able to see the thread, which connects all of us. When these words were uttered, you know the result, 7000

people received a thrill, for a split second, and they became aware of this unity of existence. They had to stand up; they had to give him an ovation. They could not have done otherwise, because it was a force rooted in the experience of a Tapasvi. When he knows that he is part of the Truth, of the whole universal existence, he has to dance, there is no stopping, whether it is Meera, whether it is Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa or Chaitanya Mahaprabhu. Of course, at the parliament of religions, there was no scope for dancing. So, all they could do was stand up and give him a mighty ovation. As I said, everything else of Swamiji's message is a commentary on these five words.

Expansion is Life

I will just go through a few utterances of his, so that we can understand what an expansive vision, what depth he can give to all of us. Consider first, his remark, "Expansion is life, contraction is death." How do we expand? If we eat a lot of potatoes and meat, we expand but not in a very good way. It will create many inconveniences in life. How do you expand physically? How do you expand mentally? Intellectually and spiritually? Think about it. You will discover that expansion has only one meaning. That we should know how to interconnect ourselves with the rest of the universe. The universe is filled with truth and all that we have to do is expand and be in touch with that truth. Expand yourself intellectually through knowledge. Activate the grey matter in your brain through contemplation, through meditation. Thinking over, pondering over the meanings of the great message which has been handed over to us, whether it is from Swami Vivekananda or the Upanishads or the Vedas or from the different spiritual traditions that we have. Not only Hinduism, Christianity or Islam, everywhere the great masters have spoken words which we should not be considered as of a bookish value or merely for a preacher's sermon, but we must think about it and you will get wonderful insights. So, expand by improving the capacity of your brain, to work upon it. And what happens then? Then, the message becomes more and more vibrant. It starts melting into the language of the heart. It should! And when it comes to the heart, how do we expand?

What is Love?

Today, our heart knows only that kind of love which is actually an attachment for people around us - my family, my brother, my husband, my children- that is all the attachment we have, that is all the love which we know. And Swamiji speaks of such a love as trading in love. We have become traders in love. That is not expansion. That is contraction. So, we

expand by learning to love everything under the Sun. Love is such a wonderful facet of truth. Take that truth and live it in your life. Learn to love everything, whoever comes in contact with you. How do we show our love to people? Not just by saying, do something. There is our body, this wonderful instrument that has been given to us. To express that love through service and sacrifice. These are the only two ways. In every other ways you start showing your love, it will degrade you as a human being. These are the only two ways with which you can interconnect with the whole universe in a very

purposeful way, relinquishing your selfish motivation and trying to serve. That is how this became a Tyaaga bhoomi, they discovered the great Adhyaatmic Power, spiritual power which is there in Tyaaga. It is called Tyaaga bhoomi; all of you must experience that. Do some tyaaga, without telling anybody what you are doing. Try to help. That is what religion is supposed to be. More than any education, more than anything else, the books you read, the pictures you see and the lectures you hear, what actually can transform you

is an idea which you live in your life. When you start doing that, your whole personality gets integrated with that idea.

Assimilating ideas

I remember, as a college student I read a beautiful book "magnificent obsession", by one of the famous authors of that time, Lloyd Douglas. There is a great surgeon but somehow his greatness was not revealed in his works. So, he was getting a little frustrated. Everyday, he used to go to a pub and watch the persons handling the drinks. That man used to be so very happy and cheerful. One day this man approached him and said, "Look, I am a great surgeon, I have such faculties at my disposal, yet, I am not happy as you are. What is it that makes you so happy?" He asked him to get a Bible and read a particular page. He read, "Let the left hand know what the right hand does." Several times the doctor read it but could not make out anything. Then one day, as he pondered over it more and more, the meaning became clear to him and from that moment he started expanding his service. When he started doing that, wonder of wonders, he became a master surgeon, a reputed surgeon in the whole world. That is how we must expand. It will generate Nirbahayatva within us. Why are we afraid of people today? Because we expect something from them. When, we are engrossed in Tyaaga and Seva, we don't want anything from anybody. You can always give, when you go on giving, not asking for a return, then there is no need to be afraid of anybody. Spiritually, how do we expand? Today, we think, the idol we worship, the idea, which we have, that alone is true, but not the whole of the truth. Sister Nivedita says about Swami Vivekananda, "He taught us a religion which was not afraid of Truth anymore." They had a religion which, but it was afraid of truth. That is why Galileo and others were

punished. They felt their popularity would go down when these scientific truths are expounded to the masses. We are not afraid of that. Satyameva Jayathe Satyam Paradheemahi With such strength, they have said that truth alone triumphs. There is nothing but Truth; there is only one truth. "Ekam Sad Vipraa Bhaudaa Vadanti" This was something very great in our Indian tradition. Why were the people asked to go through a rhythm of life, a schedule in their life - Brahmacharya, Garhastya, Vanaprastha and

Sannyasa- because it makes your vision clear and lays down a clear path which helps you evolve gradually.

The Hindu Nation of Swadharma

A great responsibility has been entrusted to the teacher. If you want to teach Physics, you must know Physics well. Suppose you wanted to become a doctor but your parents forced you to become an engineer. Then, you build a fly-over, as soon as the first vehicle goes over it, the fly-over goes down! Because, your heart is not in the job you have been forced to take up. Similarly, I wanted to be an engineer but my mother was very particular that I should become a doctor. The result -"operation successful, patient died." Such things are very common now a days. "Swadharmo Nidhanam Sreyaha Para Dharmo Bhayavaha" Swami Vivekananda takes the cream out of Vedanta and puts it in a language, which is easily understood by us. Yet, the depth and the meaning are intact. Consider another example, the message of service. Our Karmendriyas need work. What sort of work? It has to be a yajna. "Sarvam Yajna Prathisthitham Karma Brahmodbhavam Vidhi."

Bhagavan has given us so many to clues to us. How should we work? What is the importance of work? How Karthruthva-Bhogtruthva bhaava (identifying oneself as the doer and recipient), how do we remove that? How do we overcome our preferences for certain types of work? How can we work without expecting anything in return, all these have been dealt with? Michel Talbet, a great physicist and admirer of Swami Vivekananda, writes, "We have not written the letter nor have we posted yet we expect a reply." When you apply for a particular post, you don?t know how much you can work, what your capacity is, but we argue first. "How much am I going to get? What are the perks? Will I be sitting in an a/c room? Will I get a chauffeur driven car?" The world we see today keeps crying, "we want this, we want that" but doesnot want to give anything at all. That has made us a characterless nation. Somebody, was telling me, Swami Gautamanandaji went to Zambia and people there started saying that they prefer Indians to the whites because our approach to life is so similar and all that, but within in an year all the Indians hired there were sent back. There is something lacking in our character that was the thing that Swamiji was so concerned about. Just imagine, fifty three years after independence how much of money we have spent on education, how much on social service, still, in the

great state of Kerala from where I come, which is supposed to be the citadel of education, education is in doldrums, nobody knows what to do, you might have read in the newspapers, our plus two is creating such a havoc. Whether it should be part of school level education or college level etc. College teachers don?t want to teach in schools because it is something below their dignity! Confusion worse confounded. Remember those wonderful words of Swamiji, "Education is the manifestation of the perfection which is already in man." And he had the courage of conviction to give the same definition to religion."Religion is the manifestation of the divinity already in man."Divinity and perfection are the two nodes of the same scale. So, he knew, what is needed is something by which our inner divinity will be awakened. It should wake up the

spiritual resonance within. This kind of an education system which commission after commission has been trying to improve, yet we are still undecided whether to think of Goddess Saraswati or whether we should think of God at all! Now, slowly, people like us in our foundation, we are trying to identify, especially in Kerala, students with talent, there are such pockets of great genius but nobody recognises them. Because, people are interested only in the 'coat-suit-boot' education. Even if such children are ready to come, their parents will say, it must be in English medium only, without "twinkle twinkle little star", our child cannot make any progress! That is the tragedy of our country. And there is wonderful scope for work. There are people who have preserved ancient knowledge to this day and still derive great benefit out of it. Somebody asked me, without being aware of their meaning what is the use if somebody performs rituals. I replied that there lies the beauty of Hinduism. If you don't understand, they appear to be merely rituals. But if you do and live according to that understanding, fresh insights keep emerging. Hinduism is to be lived.

Conclusion

One last thought. Another such great message to us is "Work is Worship". And his greatest message to all of you is this- when people like Josephine MacLeod and others asked Swamiji, "What shall we do for you", he had a very profound yet simple answer, "Love India". Let each and every thought of yours be dedicated to this great motherland of ours. Let each and every action be dedicated to bring her more glory. Let each and every thought of ours be dedicated to this great mother. What a mother we have! Even contemplating on her many synonyms, Karma Bhoomi, Tapobhoomi, Yajñabhoomi, Punyabhoomi, Matrubhoomi etc. is enough to transform us into a better human being. "Aatmano Mokshaartham Jagat Hitaaya cha" was Swamiji's motto which he incorporated into the Ramakrishna Mission's symbol. Every work we do should make us a better human being. Just as a bud opens into a flower and becomes fragrant and exudes honey, in the same way out of the work we do, we must experience joy. As you work outside, you should grow within. Our scriptures say, that each one of us has our dharma, from Brahma down to the ant and we are supreme in our own dharma, there is no gradation in that. As scientists, you have great responsibilities. Assimilate this great knowledge, sit at the feet of great teachers and get enlightened with their knowledge. Give your knowledge back to the people of this country. That is Swamiji's message.