

Swami Vivekananda — a Warrior Saint

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Swami Vivekananda was born on January 12, 1863 and died at just 39 years of age on July 4, 1902. His 150th birth anniversary was observed in January 2013. The following article has been written on the occasion of his 112th death anniversary that falls this week.

In the struggle for India's freedom numerous men and women sacrificed their lives. One amongst them was Swami Vivekananda. Though he did not directly challenge foreign rule, yet his contribution in the awakening of his countrymen and inculcating patriotic feelings in them was tremendous. Tilak has aptly described him as 'the real father of Indian nationalism'.

Born and brought up in colonial India, the Swami, since childhood, hated British rule. His yearning for freedom led him to join the Brahmo Samaj, a patriotic organisation, which had been set up to uplift the then Indian society. However, its slow pace could not retain him long in its fold. Besides, he disagreed with Brahmos that British rule in India was a blessing and divinely ordained. His sharp intellect and vast knowledge—which he had acquired during his college days by reading numerous books, other than the prescribed texts—detected that the real motive of India's enslavement by the British was economic. He used to explain to his audience: 'The conquest of India by England is not a conquest of Jesus or Bible as we are often asked to believe....Behind the name of the Lord Jesus, the Bible....there is always the virtual presence of England whose war flag is the factory chimney, whose troops are the merch-antmen, whose battlefields are the market places of the world, whose Empress is the shining Goddess of Fortune herself.' He criticised the Brahmo Samaj and Arya Samaj and other sects as 'useless mixtures...voices of apology to English masters'.

It was *Anandmath*, a novel written by Bankim Chandra Chatterjee, which shook the very core of his being. The novel depicted a group of young men living in disguise as *sanyasins* in a *math*, going out on the pretext of pilgrimage, gathering followers and weapons and fighting against the oppressors. In future, he enacted the same novel in real life. He became a disciple of Ramakrishna Paramhansa and started living in his Belur *math* with other *gurubhais*. However, instead of reading and teaching religious scriptures, the Swami would focus on delivering lectures to his *gurubhai* on Indian and world history, politics and science.

He left the *math* after his Guru Ramakrishna Parmahansa's death and embarked on a long journey without disclosing his future plans to his *gurubhai*. He travelled extensively in *sanyasin's* robe and with assumed names, to feel the pulse of the nation and to explore the possibility of an uprising to end the foreign rule. For that he contacted revolutionaries, princes and even gun-maker Hiram Maxim.. He met and made friends with Maharaja of Khetri—Ajit

Singh, Raja of Baroda—Gaekwad, Raja of Ramnad, Mysore, Kolhapur, Bhavnagar, Hyderabad, Travancore etc. He visited schools, colleges and exhorted students, through his discourses, to serve their motherland. 'Motherland should be taken not as a country but as a Goddess and the duty towards the country should be like worship. 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.'

Admonishing all Indians for the deplorable situation of the country, he said: 'Can that be called a society which is formed by an aggregate of men who are like lumps of clay, like lifeless machines, like heaped up pebbles? How can such a society fare-well?' 'You have well-nigh thrown the country into ruin by crying, It is impossible, it is impossible! What cannot human effort achieve?'

During his travels he came in contact with a large number of people who sought his blessings for a better future or fortune. He asked them to stop looking up to saints or God for help and conveyed his political message through religious terminology.

'We are responsible for what we are; and whatever we wish ourselves to be, we have the power to make ourselves. If what we are now has been the result of our past actions, it certainly follows that whatever we wish to be in future can be produced by our present actions...' 'What can meditation do? What can the mantra and Tantra do? You must stand on your feet. "You are the creator of your own destiny...the maker of your own fate.'

He used to tell his listeners: 'The great sin is to think yourself weak...stand up and say, I am the Master of all. We forge the chain and we alone can break it,' and 'let name and fame and money go; they are terrible bondage. Feel the wonderful atmosphere of freedom.' 'Even at the gate of the death, in the greatest danger, in the thick of the battlefield, at the bottom of the ocean, on the top of the mountains, in the thickest of the forest, tell yourself I am He, I am He. Day and night say I am He. It is the greatest strength; it is religion.'

'It is against the big tree that the great winds strike'; 'poking a fire makes it burn better' and 'a snake struck on the head raises its hood', 'face the brute, face it boldly.'

He was disappointed by the modern boys and would often deplore saying: 'What would these namby-pamby boys with no strength in the body, with no intellect in the brain and no courage in the heart do.'

'What I want is the muscles of iron and nerves of steel, inside which dwells a mind of the same material as that of the thunderbolt is made. Strength, Manhood, Kshatriya-Virya and Brahma-Teja.'

He asked Indians to believe in themselves. 'If you have faith in all three hundred and thirty million gods...and still have no faith in yourselves, there is no salvation for you. Have faith in yourselves and stand up on that faith and be strong.' 'Each one of us is heir-apparent to the Emperor of Emperors; we are the substance of God Himself.'

'A nation of dyspeptics indulging in antics to the accompaniment of *khol* and *kartal* and singing *kirtan* and other songs of sentimental type...I wish to stimulate energy even by means of martial music.' 'We must shake the earth....In following such an ideal of manliness alone there is the welfare of Motherland.'

He exhorted them to fight for freedom. 'What fear! Who is powerful enough to thwart you!' 'We shall crush the stars to atoms and unhinge the universe'.

'Without freedom life is not worth living hence get freedom at the cost of life.' 'Conquest is my Mantram,' he proclaimed. 'There is that human instinct to rebel against nature's law... We are born rebels...No laws for us...Freedom is the song of the soul.'

He used to advise his followers to follow Upanishads and Gita as both the scriptures do not talk of salvation but freedom and manliness. He emphasised over the worship of Kali, the symbol of strength and was critical of Buddhism as it preached non-violence and lacked in power and force.

'Defeat is better than a vegetating ignorant life; it is better to die in a battlefield than to live a life of defeat.' He poured out his patriotic lava in the following poem:

*"Go forward without a path;
Even as the lion, not trembling at noises;
Even as the wind, not caught in a net,
Even as the lotus-leaf contained water,
Do thou wander alone like the rhinoceros."*

At another place he said: 'Your country requires heroes, be heroes, stand like rocks... What India wants is a new electric fire to stir up fresh vigour in the national vein. Be brave, man dies but once.' Wherever he went, government spies followed him. However, the authorities could not dare to arrest him, 'for it would rouse the country,' as his disciple Sister Nivedita stated, 'and I, the most loyal English woman...would be the first to rise up.'

Though the majority in Vivekananda's meetings used to be Hindus and he preached patriotism through Hinduism, yet he cannot be the *guru* of the advocates of *Hindu Rashtra* because in his view, it is not only religion but the community of feeling and of aspirations that makes a nation. 'Besides, for nation-making,' he said, 'fusion of different races and tribes and acceptance of different customs, religions and languages, is essential as out of such fusion is born the true national spirit which can be enduring.' He was also against the imposition of a common language

upon the linguistic minorities. He believed that variety in unity is necessary for the real development of the society as well as the nation. For one religion to become the nation's religion would be dangerous. 'One religion cannot suit all..... God forbid that any such state should come upon the people of India.'

He asked his countrymen to keep away from religious struggle as: 'there runs an economic struggle through every religious struggle. This animal called man has some religious influence but he is guided by economy.' 'No religion preaches hatred, enmity or fights', and those who incite the people to do these things are motivated by political interests.

Giving a call for national solidarity he said that 'India belongs to all its inhabitants and all are the children of Mother India. Each one should be proud of being an Indian and each should proudly proclaim: I am an Indian, every Indian is my brother.'

'We have either to go forward or to go backward. We have either to progress or to degenerate...How can we go back and degenerate ourselves? That cannot be; that must not be; going back will lead to national decay and death.'

He thus advocated secular and progressive approach for solving any problem.

He visited America not for religious purpose but for the fulfilment of the mission he had set before himself. He revealed: 'I did not go to America, as most of you know for the Parliament of Religions but for this demon of a feeling was in me and within my soul. I travelled twelve years all over India. Finding no way to work for my countrymen and that is why I went to America. Most of you know that, who knew me then. Who cared for this Parliament of Religions? Here was my own flesh and blood sinking everyday: and who cared for them.'

As a matter of fact, he did not carry out even the formalities required for selection as a delegate to the Parliament. Before his departure to the United States, he said to his brother monk, Haribhai that he was going there to raise funds for the regeneration of India.

In America he lectured not only on religion but also on Indian prosperity before the British rule and denounced the British rule in India.

A notable feature of Vivekananda's addresses at this time, which the American newspapers did not fail to notice, was his patriotism. To quote one of these: 'His patriotism was perfervid. The manner in which he speaks of 'my country' is most touching. That one phrase revealed him not as a monk, but as man of his people.' He was called a 'Warrior Saint'. He visited America twice and the second time he wanted to take along Saraladebi Choudhurani, a fiery nationa-list; but that could not materialise.

After his return to India, he made vigorous efforts to reach out to his countrymen. He started two bi-weekly journals in English named *Brahmavadin* and *Prabudha Bharata* and a Bengali magazine *Udbodhana*. He contributed a number of articles to all these journals.

'Let us all work hard, my brethren....On our work depends the coming of the India of future.'

'You have cried to all the gods of the world. Has misery ceased? The masses in India cry to six million gods, and still die like dogs. Where are these gods?....you are infinite spirit it does not befit you to be slave...Arise, Awake, Stand Up and Fight.'

He was against begging for freedom. 'That is not the way to build up patriotism anywhere. Beggars bowl has no place in a Banik [merchant] world of machine, mammon and merchandise.' He was critical of the Congress policy of getting reforms by pleasing and pleading with the rulers. Attacking the Congress approach, he said: 'Our young fools organise meetings to get more power from the English. They only laugh. None deserves liberty who is not ready to give liberty. Suppose the English give over to you all the power, why the power that be then, will hold the people down, and let them not have it. Slaves want power to make slaves.' The Congress, in his opinion, was keen only in grabbing political power and replacing the English by themselves. However, he appreciated the secular character of the Congress but did not regard Congressmen true patriots as they did not think of raising the downtrodden.

He admired the Congress militants and was in close touch with them. Once, during his travels he stayed for a week at Tilak's residence in Bombay. He praised the Chapekar brothers of Pune who had murdered Mr Rand and Mr Ayerst of the Plague Commission who had dishonoured Indian women in the name of medical examination. The Chapekar brothers were convicted and sentenced to death. Vivekananda enquired of Tilak as to why a memorial was not being built for the martyrs who had been hanged for their patriotism. He suggested that golden statues of these martyrs be erected at the Gateway of India in Bombay.

During his last days of life, he lived in Belur Math. He was not keeping good health; yet he continued inculcating the revolutionary spirit in his followers, especially the youth who used to come to him in large numbers for blessings and guidance. When requested to rest, the Swami used to say: 'No rest! I shall die in harness....Let me live and die fighting' and 'I shall consider it a great honour, if had to go through hell in doing good to my country.' His fiery words produced patriotic heat and whosoever came in contact with him could not escape its revolutionary impact. He would burst like a hurricane on his audience. Like a 'burning dynamite', he electrified the nation. Numerous students gave up their studies and followed the path unveiled by their hero.

Vivekananda died on July 4, 1902. Within three years of his death concrete efforts were made to wrest freedom by revolutionary means. The revolutionary fervour engulfed entire Bengal, Bombay and Punjab. The spirit of fearlessness manifested everywhere. Patriotic speeches and writings of Vivekananda became the Bible for all the revolutionaries and were found in every house of the revolutionary and hostel rooms in colleges during the upsurge of 1905. It was the

first attempt of the revolutionaries to translate the mission of Vivekananda. Fortytwo years later India won its freedom.

However, it was not the freedom the Swami had aspired and worked for. He stood not only for the demolition of the British domination but also to change the system controlled and used by the upper classes for their vested interests. He sought to build an independent India on the principles of justice, equality, freedom, fraternity, and tolerance. The prevalent fanaticism, communalism, discriminations and deprivations had no place in his vision of New India. The real tribute to his memory on July 4 will be to reconstruct the country according to his ideas.

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