

THE WANDERING MONK OF INDIA-AN INSIGHT INTO THE JOURNEY OF NAREN/NARENDRA BECOMING SWAMI VIVEKANANDA

By

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Abstract

This research paper aims to present a deeper insight into the birth, life and conditions that caused the transformation of the boy Naren as the World Guru Swami Vivekananda. It also aims to penetrate into his spiritual flights and his relationship with his mentor Sri Ramakrishna Paramhansa. This paper will also highlight the journey of Swami Vivekananda to the parliament of religions which changed the course of the fate of his mother land.

Keywords: *karma, wisdom, divine, fraternity, equality, potential, ultimate truth.*

Introduction

“Never forget the glory of human nature! We are the Greatest God... Christs and Buddhas are waves on the boundless Ocean which I AM” (Rolland I).

This declaration is ample to render the majesty of earthly animation. The mortal life is a priceless gift of the Omnipotent, a cherished desire of the Omniscient and the most illustrious reality of the life created by the Omnipresent. The throbbing life is manifested in numerous schemes and structures on this earth. It is visible in flora also and is evident in fauna as well; but human life, phenomenal in its stately appearance, has its own agreeableness, its own allurements. Even Gods yearn to embrace this evanescent parturition. The cause behind this is the unrivalled amalgamation of Karma and Viveka, i.e. accountability for their actions and discernment towards them, among human beings. Even the dumb animals perform their duty but the humans synthesize their obligations with perception.

The History displays the testimony of the rise of such terrestrials on the globe whose lives odentate indomitable instances of *Karma-Yoga*. These distinguished Masters of the self not only gave the clarion call towards the attainment of the goal of human lives but also soothed the soil with their inception. At times, great *Karma-Yogis* have appeared on the horizon of life and their works have garnered great reverence for them from all nooks and corners of the world.

Objective of the Study

The objective of this paper is one such *Karma Yogi*, who left the world spell bound by his selfless action and ineffable wisdom. Such was the magnetism of his persona; such was the aura of the WANDERING MONK OF INDIA- SWAMI VIVEKANANDA.

For him, the glory of human life consisted in the fact that.....

“Of all living beings, man alone has a hunger in his heart to know the whence and whither,

the whys and wherefores of things" (Ghosh 44).

Vivekananda was born in the colonized India where people and the society were forced to lead a life of slavery on their own land. The invaders made efforts to split apart Indians from their roots, from their culture, from their traditions. Where the aristocrats and the bureaucrats of the society (the bourgeois class) participated in the infringement, the common masses (the proletariats) took it as a will of the God. As a result, their religious faith began to decline.

The wheel of time brings us face-to-face with a bizarre picture of the Indian society as the countrymen were exploiting their brethren only. The bourgeoisie and the proletariats became puppets in the hands of the foreign intruders. This catastrophe was brought upon the Indian society by the twin fiends, one, being, the foreign colonization; and the other, the helplessness of the poor Indians. This was the most appropriate time for the accession of the Warrior Saint (as Vivekananda has been referred to by some of the critics) on this earth. It was only a Divine Providence that Vivekananda appeared as a prophet on the waves of time to bestow spiritual relief upon the children of God at such a time when they pined for it the most. He came to heal up their wounds.

Discussion

The advent of Vivekananda took place in the famous Dutta Family of Kolkata (the then Calcutta) on 12th Jan. 1863. The new born child was named Narendra Nath Dutta, the first child of Vishwanath Dutta, the famous Barrister, and Bhuvaneshwari Devi, a lady deeply rooted in the Indian culture. Both of his parents played an invigorating role in

bringing out the innate virtues in the child Narendra.

Narendra learnt lessons of discipline, generosity of heart and sympathetic view towards the poor and the deprived ones from his father.

As far as his mother is concerned, Narendra was motivated most by her qualities of proper concern for the under – privileged, serene submission to God, inner contentment and reputed isolation.

From his early childhood days only, the marks of divinity were distinguishable in Narendra. Since then, he fancied becoming a sanyasi, a monk. The stories narrated by his mother kindled the flame of spirituality that was inherent in Narendra. The dislike for caste and creed system was innate in him. He only believed in the religion of fraternity and equality. He was against untouchability and had a great sympathy and compassion for the masses.

An instance is related to the same. There was a guest room in his father's house where different hookahs (narghiles), for the people of different castes, were kept. One day, he went there and started smoking from each one of them. When his father came in, he was astonished to see the spectacle before his eyes. To his question, Narendra replied that he was there to test if something harmful or wrong happens to him after having tasted from the narghiles of different classes. His father could not say anything but smiled at it. He could foresee the strength of love for humanity in his son's heart and his firm belief in the universal unity of mankind.

Narendra was born with a free soul. The celestial life began to bud in him in the

period of his formal education. He had waded through the interpretations from the *Ramayana*, and had emulated the long story of *Rama's* struggle and conquest, with all the sensation of relishing an intimate picturesque enterprise.

Narendra was, in his mindset, an ideal Renaissance man. He was fond of education, open to changes, brave and courageous at the same time. It was his intellect, his brainpower that enthralled people towards him, towards his words, towards his knowledge. But his corporeal personality was, at the same time, no less attractive than his intellectual magnetism. Romain Rolland describes him as....

"He was tall (5 feet, 8½ inches), square-shouldered, broad-chested, stout, rather heavily built, his arms were muscular and trained to all kinds of sports. He had an olive complexion, a full face, a vast forehead, strong jaw, a pair of magnificent eyes, large, dark, and rather prominent, with heavy lids, whose shape recalled to classic comparison to a lotus petal. Nothing escaped the magic of his glance, capable equally of embracing in its irresistible charm, or of sparkling with wit, irony or kindness, of losing itself in ecstasy, or of plunging imperiously to the very depths of consciousness and of withering with its fury" (Rolland 02).

But his unsurpassable attribute was his kingliness. He was a born king and all those associated with him found it great to pay homage to his majesty.

Since birth, Naren had celestial potential in him and very often, he underwent many such experiences which testified his Divinity. One such was his daily experience. At night, as soon as he drifted off to sleep, he

projected an unbelievable expanse of dazzling gleam between his eyebrows and experienced the radiance changing hues and stretching, overlapping and plunging his whole body in a flux of ivory glory. As his mind was immersed in this phenomenon, his body fell asleep. It continued to repeat every day. Since he found it natural, he didn't mention it. Later, when he met Sri Ramakrishna, he was asked if he sees a light like that, to which Narendra replied affirmatively. This day, Sri Ramakrishna prophesied that Narendra was a born saint and one day everyone would realize his potentiality.

For Narendra, school-books were the means for qualifying exams; otherwise as was his nature, he used to read the books of Literature, Philosophy and History with keen and deep interest. The Igoism of Decart, the Atheism of Hume and Waine, the Evolution theory of Darwin and the theory of Herbert Spencer were the matters that attracted him the most. At an early age, Narendra had read the poetry of Shelley, the philosophy of Hegal and the History of French Revolution. Other than this, he also used to read Sanskrit poems, *Upanishads* and the books of Raja Ram Mohan Roy with ardent enthusiasm. The verses of famous American poet Walt Whitman were also a matter of great interest to him. But all these readings didn't lead him anywhere. His quest was leading him to a nameless destination. He was not content with the books and the theories he had studied and amassed. He wanted a face-to-face rendezvous with reality. Even the *Brahmo Samaj* could not satiate his thirst for knowledge. As a lotus craves for the first rays of the morning sun, Narendra appeared to be waiting for the grace of a true master

who could quench his yearning for the realization of the ultimate truth.

His first meeting with his Guru Sri Ramakrishna Paramhansa was the most memorable and beautiful incident of his life. This meeting changed the course of his life forever. There is an interesting story associated with the same. Once, his Principal Mr. William Hastie was teaching Wordsworth's famous poem 'Excursion' in the class where the blissful state of trance is discussed in great detail. Narendra stood in his class and asked Mr. Hastie if he knew anyone who had attained the blessed phase of trance and his answer was, Sri Ramakrishna at Dakshineswar Temple, who had assimilated the reverie of trance. He further said that one must visit Sri Ramakrishna Paramhansa to realize the ecstasy of trance.

This roused curiosity in Narendra to see him as he was ardent to meet a man having experiences of a higher kind. In the very first meeting, he candidly asked Sri Ramakrishna, whether he had seen God, as it was Naren's second nature of asking this question to every great man he met. So far, none could give him an affirmative reply of having seen the God. But here, for the first time, he received an unrestricted approving answer. Sri Ramakrishna replied....

"Yes, I see Him just as I see you here, rather more vividly. God can be realized, one can see and talk to Him as I am seeing and talking to you, but who cares? People shed torrents of tears for their wife and children, for wealth or property, but who does so for the sake of God? If one weeps sincerely for Him, He surely manifests himself" (Ghosh 19).

This had the most profound impact on the thought-currents of Narendra. He was beatified by the man who claimed to have seen God. Though he considered Ramakrishna insane, yet, he felt a queer sentience of consecration impart through his entire mind and body, intellect and soul.

Since Ramakrishna was very simple and ordinary looking *Brahmin* and there was nothing remarkable about him at the first sight. Therefore, the sophisticated Narendra's yielding to Sri Ramakrishna was not prompt. He came away from *Dakshineswar* with apparently no further interest in going there again, yet the craving to have one more meeting with Sri Ramakrishna, the desire to have one more glimpse of the person who had seen God, persisted, and at last, he resigned himself to the call of his soul.

Sri Ramakrishna was completely aware of Narendra's nature of examining before accepting, so he was determined to give Narendra a finesse of some celestial experiences. As days went by, Narendra felt himself immersed in an inexplicable ecstasy of love and bosom companionship radiating from Sri Ramakrishna. The fathomless intimacy that developed between the mentor and the protégé was truly par excellence and intense beyond delineation. It did not appear all of a sudden but its growth was slow and gradual. It was one of the sacred most of mortal affinity.

Like Christ chose Peter to lay the foundation of the Church, *Krishna* transmitted the message of *Srimad Bhagvad Gita* through *Arjuna*, and *Buddha* selected *Ananda* to spread the message of compassion – Sri Ramakrishna discovered Narendra as the one who would carry his message to the

world, his message of *Jeeve Shiva* (i.e. every life in the universe has the divine potentiality within itself); his message of treating poor and pauper alike; his message of not searching for God in stones, in temples, in objects, but for serving him in every being of the world. His message is evident in the following lines....

"Leaving the different forms of life that exist before you, where art thee seeking God; he who loves all beings, is the one who serves God" (Ghosh 18).

His rendezvous with Sri Ramakrishna Paramhansa transformed his perception towards life and living beings. Sri Ramakrishna illumined Naren's rationality. Naren accepted something only when it was no longer rational and logical to deny it. The potentiality of truth satisfied Naren's faculties and supported him to subdue the emotions of Epicureanism. Sri Ramakrishna understood the flights of Naren's soul, and let his mind evolve itself to become its own master. He allowed Naren to doubt him and to try him. He advised him that the goal of human life lies neither in agreement nor in disagreement; but one can seek and realize God only by actually witnessing it. Naren had the highest reverence and adoration for his Master, yet he accepted his teachings only after he was satisfied with the element of truth in it.

Vivekananda had learnt from his master that the most noble way to realize God is to serve the down-trodden, with the understanding of God in the human i.e. *Jeeve-Shiva*. He accepted it as the highest manifesto of his life and devoted himself for the alleviation of suffering of the common man. In close communion with his Master, he began to work for the spiritual upliftment of the

people. He wanted to wake them up from the age-long slumber of caste, creed and religion. Jyotirmayananda observes....

"Swami Vivekananda's greatest achievements include the reconstruction of Hinduism, the change of its image in the West, the starting of movement of social and cultural regeneration, all of which were directly linked to the birth of Indian Nationalism, which was taking place at that time. The key to all these contributions was Swami Vivekananda's modernization of Hinduism" (Ghosh 57-58).

Vivekananda always led the life of a *parivrajaka* or a wandering monk. He travelled across the length and breadth of India; comprehended the fundamentals of Jainism and Buddhism, the vivacity of Ramananda and Dayananda; became *bhakta* of the devotional poets and learnt about the saints of the various parts. He apprehended the beliefs and the pledges of the subjugated and was deeply touched by the ignorance, misery and squalor of the common Indian. He was possessed by an ardent will to ameliorate these evils.

In this universe, the mortal being, whether rich or poor, suffers in some respect or the other. The poor are posed to material wants; the rich are devoid of spiritual wealth. In order to accomplish his mission; he kept company with the kings and the statesmen. He asserted...

"If I can win over to my cause those in whose power are wealth and the administration of the affairs of the thousands, my mission will be accomplished sooner; by influencing one Maharaja alone I can indirectly benefit thousands of people" (Mumukshananda 03).

Vivekananda emerged on the waves of time with the mission of spreading the message of Indian scriptures in each corner of the world. In order to do so, he reached Chicago to represent Indian enlightenment at the Parliament of Religions in 1893. His address to the audience as "My Dear Sisters and Brothers of America", garnered a thundering standing ovation for full three and a half minutes. He addressed the public of Chicago in the language they wanted to hear and the result was his magnificent breakthrough. The essence of his message was Universal Religion. He declared that no religion is superior or inferior to the other. He quoted from the *Shivmahimnastrotranam* (07).

"As the different streams, having their sources in different places, all mingle their water in the sea, so, O Lord, the different paths which men take, through different tendencies various though they may appear, crooked or straight all lead to Thee" (Ghosh 87).

His message preached unity in diversity. His coming to the West has been marked as the beginning of the Western engrossment in Hinduism. He knew it well enough that where India had advanced in spiritualism, West had acquired tremendous scientific progress; yet there existed a void in the lives of people at both the places. His purpose was not only to fill in the spiritual vacuity of the West, but also to ensure the incoming of the means of material livelihood for the common Indian masses. Thus, he decided to teach spirituality to the Americans, and in return, they might share their worldly knowledge with India which could not only have only brought the two greatest civilizations of all times together but would have added new chapters to the global harmony. He declared.....

"The root cause of all the difficulties between the Indians and the English was not 'knowing each other' ... We can learn many things from the West, but the world is waiting for the treasure of our spirituality ... therefore we must go out, exchange the gem of spirituality for anything they have to give us If you want to become equal with the Englishman or the American, you will have to teach as well as to learn" (Vivekananda 45).

He assumed the role of a world teacher and tried to instill into mankind the kernel of unity. He belonged to the whole world and the universe belonged to him as for him, every being has Divinity within oneself and therefore, everyone is connected with each other. This was his concept of universal equality and fraternity.

He found numerous greater qualities in the Western culture of life which were useful for the Indian ways of living. He asked Indians to learn from the West their great concern for under privileged, respect and liberty for the women and the ability for making prompt advancement.

He was a rightful democrat. He believed that a man is no mere machine but is potentially Divine. His belief was based on his colossal reliance in the powers of man. He was a prolific genius. He wanted to revitalize India through its vivifying religion. He never claimed to be a philosopher or a social reformer; he only took himself as a preacher of his motherland, of its off springs and their religion. His genius led Sri Ramakrishna to say....

"Naren is not a pond but a reservoir. He is not a pitcher or a jug, he is a veritable barrel. He is not a minnow or sardine; he is a huge red-eyed carp. He is not an ordinary sixteen

petalled lotus; he is a glorious lotus with a thousand petals” (Jyotirmayananda 182).

Vivekananda not only empowered India with his speeches, but also advocated many reforms. He taught the western world the original identity of India, Indians and Indian Religions. Ninian Smart says....

“The Universalist message of Swami Vivekananda and of his Master Ramakrishna, genuinely represents a new departure in World Religions, the attempt to make the highest form of Hinduism a world faith” (Jyotirmayananda 16).

He was proud of being the follower of a religion which taught the world to be enduring to believe in all the religions of the world. He re-interpreted Hinduism, not as a cult but as an all-encompassing and all-enveloping faith in the Divine which proclaims direct relationship of man with the Supreme and preaches various paths of divine communion embed with the spirit of true love i.e. *Para-Bhakti*. Vivekananda redefined Hinduism as the religion of love. His emphasis was to teach and instill humanity with the spirit of love which is the ultimate answer and solution to the disharmony and discord prevailing in the world. His speeches are infused by the binding force of love between the man in India and mankind overseas.

Essentially his message was twofold. In the West, he was the teacher and practitioner of Indian spirituality, and in the East, among his countrymen he was a social reformer. As Tapan Raichaudhari observes....

“Swami Vivekananda had a twofold agenda which he had time to pursue for less than a decade: to preach an universalist spiritual

faith based on the life of his Master which he saw as the ultimate realization of the Vedantic truth; and secondly, to create a mass consciousness through service and education” (Jyotirmayananda 18).

'The Wandering Monk of India' impressed the West so much with his knowledge of the self and scriptures, that after his address in the Parliament of Religion, few among the audience said that instead of United Kingdom sending missionaries to India, the people of India should send missionaries to the entire Europe. It was a meteoric and tremendous transformation of a nation which was colonized for its so called lack of civilization and intelligence among the world. It was the ascension of India from the depths of forced obscurity to the unsurpassable heights of deserved fame; and this was made possible by Vivekananda.

Conclusion

The advent of Vivekananda has been identified as the herald of a new glorious era in the history of mankind. His radicalism and unconventionality has continued to appeal the masses and the classes from centuries. His greatest achievement has been the rebuilding of Hinduism and the change of the image of India in the West. He is also credited to begin a movement of social and cultural regeneration across the borders.

Though his mortal frame renounced the world in 1902, but the World Guru still lives and breathes through his ideologies, through his teachings, through the newness of his yet relevant ideas, and our present and upcoming generations would continue to look at him and his ideals for a better and higher understanding of the human life and its goal.

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