

# SWAMI VIVEKANANDA, THE EMBODIMENT OF GURU-POWER

EDITORIAL

## I

Swami Vivekananda has been subjected to various judgements by many. You get their opinions from the columns of the daily press and the periodicals, from the pages of the books and from the pulpits, and from the theses of the researchers. They are uttered with trenchant phrases. They seize your ears and sway your thoughts. They are varied and sometimes contradictory. 'Vivekananda is the Pioneer of Indian Independence', 'Swamiji is a great Hindu Missionary', 'A Champion of the Poor', 'A Patriot', 'A Socialist', 'An Educationist' and what not. Many of these verdicts are well-documented. They are reinforced by profuse quotations from Vivekananda's *Works* or the statements of his contemporaries. You have reasons to be bewildered.

But, listen again, a little more attentively. You hear another voice, strong but not strident, in a different tone but steady. 'Let no one judge Naren (Vivekananda),' warns the voice. 'No one will ever be able to understand him fully.'<sup>1</sup> That voice is Sri Ramakrishna's. He ought to know better, because he brought him into this world<sup>2</sup> and held 'the key' to the exit.<sup>3</sup> While forbidding others to judge Vivekananda, Sri Ramakrishna himself gave a judgement of him. Others have judged Vivekananda in retrospect, while Sri Ramakrishna did so in prospect, as a prophet would do. He did not believe much in politics or patriotism, socialism or any 'ism'. Even if he did,—which is very unlikely—he knew

them as absolutely trivial compared to the immortal essence in man.

## II

What, then, is his judgement?

At their first meeting at Dakshineswar, the Master knelt before Vivekananda, and said with folded hands :

'Lord, I know you are the ancient sage Nara—the Incarnation of Narayana—born on earth to remove the miseries of mankind.'<sup>4</sup>

Again, in one of Vivekananda's early visits, Sri Ramakrishna said to him :

'Behold, in you is Shiva! And in me is Shakti! And these two are One!'<sup>5</sup>

At Cossipore, in reply to a desire expressed by the disciple, he said :

'...I thought you were a vast receptacle of life, and here you wish to stay absorbed in personal joy like an ordinary man! ...; you will bring spiritual consciousness to men, and assuage the misery of the humble and the poor.'<sup>6</sup>

Sri Ramakrishna made many such observations, not with the aid of frail reason but through the power of unerring intuition. According to Vivekananda, this intuition was so developed in his Master that he gathered 'in ten minutes, from a man's subconscious mind, the whole of his past, and determined from that the future and his powers'.<sup>7</sup> Again, when Vivekananda protested at such adulation, the Master said, 'I cannot help it. ... The Divine Mother showed me certain things which I simply repeated. And She never reveals to

<sup>1</sup> His Eastern and Western Disciples: *The Life of Swami Vivekananda*, Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati, 1955, p. 57.

<sup>2</sup> & <sup>3</sup> Vide: *ibid.* pp. 50-1 & p. 145.

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.* p. 46.

<sup>5</sup> *ibid.* p. 61.

<sup>6</sup> Romain Rolland: *The Life of Ramakrishna*, Advaita Ashrama, Mayavati, 1930, pp. 280-1.

<sup>7</sup> *The Complete Works*, Vol. VIII (1955), p. 276.

me anything but the truth.’<sup>8</sup> As the Mother is infallible, it is safer to be guided by one who is guided by Her!

Further, Sri Ramakrishna announced his oneness with Swami Vivekananda in the Śiva-Śakti formula. If Sri Ramakrishna’s mission and message are renunciation and God-realization, can his foremost disciple’s mission and message be different? Paying homage to his Master, Vivekananda once declared: ‘I bear the feet of that man on my head; he is my hero; that hero’s life I will try to imitate.’<sup>9</sup> In a letter written to a brother-disciple, he exclaimed, ‘I am his child, nourished by his heart’s blood.’<sup>10</sup> Ramakrishna-Vivekananda was one soul which inhabited two bodies!

According to the testimony of the Mother-guided Ramakrishna, Swami Vivekananda is ‘Śiva’, born ‘to bring spiritual consciousness to people, and ‘to remove the miseries of mankind’.

### III

In the Hindu tradition, the great God Śiva, in one of His aspects, is considered as the *Lokaguru*, the Teacher of the whole universe. This idea gets a wonderfully poetic expression in Śrī Śaṅkarācārya’s hymn to Dakṣiṇāmūrti. In the temples of Southern India, we invariably come across images of Dakṣiṇāmūrti with His blissful face and the *cinnudrā* (teacher’s pose). Swami Vivekananda was Śiva, and he became the ‘Dakṣiṇāmūrti’ when he went to the South (Dakṣiṇa, in Sanskrit). In fact, his career as the world-teacher became manifest from that stage onward.

What is this ‘Śiva-power’, the power of the guru? It is the power of dispelling the darkness of ignorance which binds a soul

to the body. Vivekananda meant this power only when he said:

‘When I stand on the platform, a Power comes over me which makes me feel as though by one word I could carry the whole audience of thousands across Maya and make them break the prison-walls of “I” and “Mine”!’<sup>11</sup>

His listeners and disciples vouch for this enlightening power in him. Writing about his impressions of Swamiji’s lecture on ‘Vedanta’ in Lahore, Swami Ram Tirtha says:

‘The listeners were so deeply engrossed, and it created such an atmosphere, that all idea of time and space was lost. At times, one acquired absolute realization of oneness between oneself and the cosmic Atman.’<sup>12</sup>

This is what Sister Nivedita writes about her Master:

‘... he stood in our midst as, before all, the apostle of the inner life, the prophet of the subordination of the objective to the subjective.’<sup>13</sup>

Records in his biography tell us how his listeners felt the spiritual awakening within them, how their doubts resolved, and how they felt all fear gone.

Mrs. Ella Wheeler Wilcox, one of the foremost poetesses of America, used to attend Swami Vivekananda’s lectures and classes. She records the impressions of her husband and herself thus:

‘When it (the lecture) was over we went out with new courage, new hope, new strength, new faith, to meet life’s vicissitudes. ... Sometimes after sleepless nights of worry and anxiety, the Man would go with me to hear the Swami lecture, and then he would come out into the winter gloom and walk down

<sup>11</sup> His Eastern and Western Disciples: op. cit., Vol. IV (1918), p. 150.

<sup>12</sup> *Prabuddha Bharata*, May 1963, p. 234.

<sup>13</sup> *The Complete Works of Sister Nivedita*, Sister Nivedita Girls’ School, 1967, Vol. I, pp. 29-30.

<sup>8</sup> His Eastern and Western Disciples: op. cit. p. 58.

<sup>9</sup> *The Complete Works*, Vol. III (1955), p. 212.

<sup>10</sup> *ibid.* Vol. VI (1963), pp. 282-3.

the street smiling and say, "It is all right. There is nothing to worry over." And I would go back to my own duties and pleasures with the same uplifted sense of soul and enlarged vision.<sup>14</sup>

The Śiva-power rouses the spiritual consciousness, infuses hope, strength and faith, and grants an enlarged soul-vision, re-establishing our affinity with Eternity.

#### IV

Misery of man is an effect of ignorance. Misery is permanently removable only by getting rid of ignorance. Vivekananda by his guru-power helped men to get back their Ātman-consciousness. Misery cannot co-exist with Ātman-consciousness. More than this, Vivekananda, the saviour that he was, stood by the side of each soul. He held in a parental clasp, as it were, its trembling hands, assuring it with the words 'Don't fear'. Did not Sri Ramakrishna foretell that he would become the banyan tree under whose spreading shade millions of men and women, scorched by the misery of the world, would gather and find peace?

We have in Madame Emma Calve, the celebrated singer, a typical example of how Swamiji removed the misery of human beings. She had met with a shattering domestic tragedy which had left her heart-broken. She had even unsuccessfully attempted suicide. She came to know of Swamiji through her friends and met him. Without even looking at her, Swamiji spoke to her about her past, her present distraught condition, and how she should become happy and cheerful again. She was greatly puzzled and asked him how he could know all her past and inmost secrets of her life. Swamiji smiled and said, 'I read in you as an open book.' She later wrote about the effect of this interview:

'I left him, deeply impressed by his

<sup>14</sup> His Eastern and Western Disciples: op. cit. p. 387.

words and his personality. He seemed to have emptied my brain of all its feverish complexities and placed there instead his clear and calming thoughts. I became once again vivacious and cheerful, thanks to the effect of his powerful will.<sup>15</sup>

Even today, when you are scalded from within by the seething 'feverish complexities', you take up any collection of Swamiji's utterances and read a few. See how invariably the fever is assuaged and mental health restored. They give a shot in the arm, as it were, of strength and courage. To posterity his life and teaching have become the cooling shade of the banyan.

#### V

Vivekananda's guru-power is revealed to us, again, in his penetrative sayings. Scattered all over his *Works*, these sayings encompass every aspect of man and the universe. Especially, those which relate to religion, God, soul and spirituality are outstanding. These sparkle with an inner luminosity often seen in the Upaniṣadic *mantrams*. Surely they are sparks flashed forth from the blazing core of his realizations.

He defined religion aphoristically: 'Religion is the manifestation of the Divinity already in man.'<sup>16</sup> How beautifully he restates it, with a dualistic overtone, in another context: 'Religion is the eternal relation between the eternal soul and the eternal God.' Do you want a non-metaphysical definition of religion? Here it is: 'The pleasure of the Self is what the world calls religion.'<sup>17</sup>

We experience multiplicity within and without. Is this different from the impersonal Reality which is said to be homogeneous and non-dual? Swamiji, from his

<sup>15</sup> *ibid.* p. 351.

<sup>16</sup> *The Complete Works*, Vol. IV (1945), p. 304.

<sup>17</sup> *ibid.* Vol. VII (1947), p. 9.

jñāni's vantage-point, unifies everything at one stroke:

'There is really no difference between matter, mind and spirit. They are only different phases of experiencing the One. This very world is seen by the five senses as matter, by the very wicked as hell, by the good as heaven, and by the perfect as God.'<sup>18</sup>

Swamiji admitted the personal God, as is done by Vedānta. But the explanation he gave of this concept is original and profound: 'Some imaginations help to break the bondage of the rest. ... The highest imagination that can break all the links of the chain is that of Personal God.'<sup>19</sup>

To his all-comprehending vision, the existence of evil in God's creation was not anomalous. There was no need to usher in a 'satan' or 'devil' to account for evil. Good and evil are relative terms and generally depend on human selfishness. It is childish to bifurcate them. They are the obverse and reverse of the same coin of truth. Therefore, he boldly declared, 'I preach a God of virtue and a God of sin in one. Take Him if you dare—that is the one way to salvation.'<sup>20</sup>

As a breaker of bondage, he brought to every one the gospel of the glorious Ātman. In this he might stagger the ordinary man with the majesty of his utterance. But, all the same, he spoke out the dazzling truth without toning it down with dualistic dilution. 'Never forget', he exclaimed, 'the glory of human nature! We are the greatest God that ever was or ever will be. Christs and Buddhas are but waves on the boundless ocean which *I am*.'<sup>21</sup>

He drew our attention to the human Self as the source and centre of all knowledge. He declared: 'Go into your own room

and get the Upaniṣads out of your own Self. You are the greatest book that ever was or ever will be, the infinite depository of all that is.'<sup>22</sup>

Without the fire of dispassion, no spiritual awakening is possible. This world should be seen as hollow and vain. Swamiji gave us the correct perspective about this world: 'A little of the Infinite is projected into consciousness, and that we call our world.'<sup>23</sup> 'This world is nothing. It is at best a hideous caricature, a shadow of the Reality.'<sup>24</sup> Therefore, he warned: 'Remember! the message of India is always "*Not the soul for Nature, but Nature for the soul!*"'<sup>25</sup>

When Vivekananda speaks of Sādhanā or spiritual striving, we almost catch a glimpse of his own intense struggles to realize the Truth. The practical hints and instructions strewn in his *Works* would be an illuminating and rewarding study for any aspirant after the higher life. He says:

'This intense longing—becoming mad after realizing God or getting the knowledge of the self is real spirituality.'<sup>26</sup>

'Let us put forth all our energies to acquire that which never fails—our spiritual perfection.'<sup>27</sup>

'It is better to die seeking a God than as a dog seeking only carrion.'<sup>28</sup>

As an integral and indispensable part of Sādhanā, Swamiji greatly emphasized meditation. He was himself a past-master in it from birth. Sri Ramakrishna's hawk-eye had detected it almost on their first meeting. Swamiji exhorts all to meditate in these inspiring words:

'Meditation is the one thing. Meditate!

<sup>18</sup> *ibid.* Vol. V (1959), p. 272.

<sup>19</sup> *ibid.* Vol. VII (1947), p. 97.

<sup>20</sup> *ibid.* Vol. I (1946), p. 338.

<sup>21</sup> *ibid.* Vol. VII (1947), p. 76.

<sup>22</sup> *ibid.* Vol. VII (1947), p. 69.

<sup>23</sup> *ibid.* Vol. I, (1946), p. 226.

<sup>24</sup> *ibid.* Vol. II, (1958), p. 174.

<sup>25</sup> *ibid.* Vol. VIII (1955), p. 261.

<sup>26</sup> *ibid.* Vol. VI (1963), p. 457.

<sup>27</sup> *ibid.* Vol. II, (1958), p. 37.

<sup>28</sup> *ibid.* VII, (1947), p. 43.

The greatest thing is meditation. It is the nearest approach to spiritual life—the mind meditating. It is the one moment in our daily life that we are not at all material—the Soul thinking of itself, free from all matter—this marvellous touch of the Soul!’<sup>29</sup>

## VI

It is indeed very difficult to comprehend Vivekananda. He is like the sun. You may describe the sun as a bright, hot disc or in terms of corona or flares or prominences. Unless and until you describe the nuclear process occurring in its core, your description of the sun is superficial. Once that is understood all other solar phenomena stand explained. Vivekananda’s patriotism or socialism, his being a Hindu missionary or social reformer, his being an educationist or

a fiery nationalist—all these are external aspects of his personality. When we see him as a *Brahmajñānī*, a knower of the Supreme Truth, and a *Lokaguru*, a world-teacher, we can be sure of understanding him rightly. That is also the perspective provided by Sri Ramakrishna. Not heeding all these facts, if we persist in judging him from our fads, we will be committing a grave error.

Who but a divine teacher, whose only motive is rousing God-consciousness in men, will speak like this ?

‘It may be that I shall find it good to get outside of my body—to cast it off like a disused garment. But I shall not cease to work. I shall inspire men everywhere, until the world shall know that it is one with God.’<sup>30</sup>

<sup>29</sup> *ibid.* Vol. V (1959), p. 253.

<sup>30</sup> *ibid.* Vol. V, p. 414.

शान्ता महान्तो निवसन्ति सन्तो  
वसन्तवल्लोकहितं चरन्तः ।  
तीर्णाः स्वयं भीम भवार्णवं जना-  
नहेतुनान्यानपि तारयन्तः ॥

There are good souls, calm and magnanimous, who do good to others as does the spring, and who, having themselves crossed this dreadful ocean of birth and death, help others also to cross the same, without any motive whatsoever.

—*Vivekacūdāmaṇi*, 37.