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“उत्तिष्ठत जाग्रत प्राप्य वरान्निबोधत ।”

“Arise ! Awake ! And stop not till the Goal is reached.”

SWAMI VIVEKANANDA ON THE MASSES OF INDIA

WORLD'S INDEBTEDNESS TO THEM

Those uncared-for lower classes of India—the peasants and weavers and the rest, who have been conquered by foreigners and are looked down upon by their own people, it is they who from time immemorial have been working silently, without even getting the remuneration of their labours ! . . . Ye labouring classes of India, as a result of your silent, constant labours Babylon, Persia, Alexandria, Greece, Rome, Venice, Genoa, Baghdad, Samarkand, Spain, Portugal, France, Denmark, Holland and England have successively attained and supremacy and eminence ! And you?—Well, who cares to think of you ! My dear Swami, your ancestors wrote a few philosophical works, penned a dozen or so epics, or built a number of temples—that is all, and you rend the skies with triumphal shouts ; while those whose heart's blood has contributed to all the progress that has been made in the world,—well, who cares to

praise them? The world-conquering heroes of spirituality, war and poetry are in the eyes of all, and they have received the homage of mankind ; but where nobody looks, no one gives a word of encouragement, where everybody hates—that living amid such circumstances and displaying boundless patience, infinite love, and dauntless practicality, our proletariat are doing their duty in their homes day and night, without the slightest murmur,—well, is there no heroism in this? Many turn out to be heroes, when they have got some great task to perform. Even a coward easily gives up his life, and the most selfish man behaves disinterestedly, when there is a multitude to cheer them on ; but blessed indeed is he who manifests the same unselfishness and devotion to duty in the smallest of acts, unnoticed by all,—and it is you who are actually doing this, ye ever-trampled labouring classes of India ! I bow to you.

THEIR RELIGIOUS CULTURE

Look at this little phenomenon. There have been immense political changes within the last four or five years. Gigantic organizations undertaking to subvert the whole of existing institutions in different countries and meeting with a certain amount of success have been working all over the Western world. Ask our people if they have heard anything about them? They have heard not a word about them. But that there was a Parliament of Religions in Chicago, and that there was a Sannyâsin sent over from India to that Parliament, and that he was very well received, and since that time has been working in the West, the poorest beggar has known. I have heard that our masses are dense, that they do not want any education, and that they do not care for any information. I had at one time a foolish leaning towards that opinion myself, but I find experience is a far more glorious teacher than any amount of speculation, or any amount of books written by globe-trotters and hasty observers. This experience teaches me that they are not dense, that they are not slow, that they are as eager and thirsty for information as any race under the sun; but then each nation has its own part to play, and naturally, each nation has its own peculiarity and individuality, with which it is born. . . . Touch him (Hindu mind) on religion, on God, on the soul, on the Infinite, on spiritual freedom, and I assure you, the lowest peasant in India is better informed on these subjects than many a so-called philosopher in other lands.

. . . . I pointed out the fact that a peasant in India has, in many respects, a better religious education than many a gentleman in the West, and to-day, beyond all doubt, I myself am verify-

ing my own words. There was a time when I did feel rather discontented at the want of information among the masses of India, and the lack of thirst among them for information, but now I understand it. Where their interest lies, there they are more eager for information than the masses of any other race that I have seen or have travelled among. Ask our peasants about the momentous political changes in Europe, the upheavals that are going on in European society, and they do not know anything of them, nor do they care to know; but the peasants, even in Ceylon, detached from India in many ways, cut off from a living interest in India—I found the very peasants working in the fields there, were already acquainted with the fact that there had been a Parliament of Religions in America, and that an Indian Sannyasin had gone over there and that he had some success.

THEIR TYRANNIZED CONDITION

In India, especially, we meet with old fogies all over the land. They want to keep everything secret from the masses. These people came to the very satisfying conclusion, that they are the *crème de la crème* of this universe. They believe they cannot be hurt by these dangerous experiments. It is only the masses that can be hurt by them!

Aye, my friends, I must tell you a few harsh truths. I read in the newspapers, how, when one of our poor fellows is murdered or ill-treated by an Englishman, howls go all over the country; I read and I weep, and the next moment comes to my mind the question, who is responsible for it all. As a Vedantist I cannot but put that question to myself. . . . I therefore ask myself who is responsible, and the

answer comes every time, not the English; no, they are not responsible; it is we who are responsible for all our misery and all our degradation, and we alone are responsible. Our aristocratic ancestors went on treading the common masses of our country under foot, till they became helpless, till under this torment the poor, poor people nearly forgot that they were human beings. They have been compelled to be merely hewers of wood and drawers of water for centuries, so much so, that they are made to believe that they are born as slaves, born as hewers of wood and drawers of water. With all our boasted education of modern times, if anybody says a kind word for them, I often find our men shrink at once from the duty of lifting them up, these poor down-trodden people. Not only so, but I also find that all sorts of most demoniacal and brutal arguments, culled from the crude ideas of hereditary transmission, and other such gibberish from the Western world, are brought forward in order to brutalize and tyrannize over the poor, all the more.

Aye, in this country of ours, the very birthplace of the Vedanta, our masses have been hypnotized for ages into that state. To touch them is pollution; to sit with them is pollution! Hopeless they were born; hopeless they must remain! And the result is that they have been sinking, sinking, sinking, and have come to the last stage to which a human being can come. For what country is there in the world where man has to sleep with the cattle; and for this blame nobody else, do not commit the mistake of the ignorant. The effect is here and the cause is here too. We are to blame. Stand up, be bold, and take the blame on your own shoulders. Do not go about throwing mud at others; for all the faults you

suffer from, you are the sole and only cause.

The nation is sinking, the curse of unnumbered millions is on your heads;—those to whom we have been giving ditch-water to drink when they have been dying of thirst and while the perennial river of water was flowing past; the unnumbered millions whom we have allowed to starve in sight of plenty; the unnumbered millions to whom we have talked of *Advaita* and whom we have hated with all our strength; the unnumbered millions for whom we have invented the doctrine of *Lokâchâra*;—to whom we have talked theoretically that we are all the same and all are one with the same Lord, without even an ounce of practice. “Yet, my friends, it must be only in the mind and never in practice!” Wipe off this blot. . . Arise and awake and be perfectly sincere. Our insincerity in India is awful. . . .

And, Oh, how my heart ached to think of what we think of the poor, the low, in India. They have no chance, no escape, no way to climb up. The poor, the low, the sinner in India have no friends, no help,—they cannot rise, try however they may. They sink lower and lower every day, they feel the blows showering upon them by a cruel society, and they do not know whence the blow comes. They have forgotten that they too are men. And the result is slavery. Thoughtful people within the last few years have seen it, but unfortunately laid it at the door of the Hindu religion, and to them, the only way of bettering is by crushing this grandest religion of the world. Hear me, my friend, I have discovered the secret through the grace of the Lord. Religion is not at fault. On the other hand, your religion teaches you that every being is only your own self multiplied. But it is the want of practical application, the

want of sympathy—the want of heart. The Lord once more came to you as Buddha and taught you how to feel, how to sympathize with the poor, the miserable, the sinner, but you heard Him not. Your priests invented the horrible story that the Lord was here for deluding demons with false doctrines! True indeed, but we are the demons, not those that believed. And just as the Jews denied the Lord Jesus and are since that day wandering over the world as homeless beggars, tyrannized over by everybody, so you are bond-slaves to any nation that thinks it worth while to rule over you. Ah, tyrants! You do not know that the obverse is tyranny, and the reverse, slavery. The slave and the tyrant are synonymous.

No religion on earth preaches the dignity of humanity in such a lofty strain as Hinduism, and no religion on earth treads upon the necks of the poor and the low in such a fashion as Hinduism. The Lord has shown me that religion is not at fault, but it is the Pharisees and Sadducees in Hinduism, hypocrites, who invent all sorts of engines of tyranny in the shape of doctrines of Pâramârthika and Vyâvahârika.

Their nice little brown-studies of lives are never rudely shocked by the wail of woe, of misery, of degradation and poverty, that has filled the Indian atmosphere,—the result of centuries of oppression. They little dream of the ages of tyranny, mental, moral and physical, that has reduced the image of God to a mere beast of burden. . . .

If anybody is born of a low caste in our country, he is gone for ever, there is no hope for him. Why, what a tyranny it is! There are possibilities, opportunities and hope for every individual in this country (America). To-day he is poor, to-morrow he may become rich and learned and respected. Here every one is anxious to help the poor. In

India there is a howling cry that we are very poor, but how many charitable associations are there for the well-being of the poor? How many people really weep for the sorrows and sufferings of the millions of the poor in India? Are we *men*? What are we doing for their livelihood, for their improvement? We do not touch them, we avoid their company! Are we *men*? Those thousands of Brâhmanas—what are they doing for the low, down-trodden masses of India?

Let each one of us pray day and night for the down-trodden millions in India who are held fast by poverty, priestcraft and tyranny,—pray day and night for them. I care more to preach religion to them than to the high and the rich. I am no metaphysician, no philosopher, nay, no saint. But I am poor, I love the poor. I see what they call the poor of this country, and how many there are who feel for them! What an immense difference in India! Who feels there for the two hundred millions of men and women sunken for ever in poverty and ignorance? Where is the way out? Who feels for them? They cannot find light or education. Who will bring the light to them—who will travel from door to door bringing education to them? Let these people be your God—think of them—work for them, pray for them incessantly—the Lord will show you the way. Him I call a Mahâtman (great soul) whose heart bleeds for the poor, otherwise he is a Durâtman (wicked soul). Let us unite our wills in continued prayer for their good. We may die unknown, unpitied, unbewailed, without accomplishing anything,—but not one thought will be lost. It will take effect, sooner or later. My heart is too full to express my feeling; you know it, you can imagine it. So long as the millions live

in hunger and ignorance, I hold every man a traitor, who having been educated at their expense, pays not the least heed to them! I call those men who strut about in their finery, having got all their money by grinding the poor, wretches, so long as they do not do anything for those two hundred millions who are now no better than hungry savages! We are poor, my brothers, we are no-bodies; but such have been always the instruments of the Most High.

The one problem you have is to give to the masses their rights. You have the greatest religion which the world ever saw, and you feed the masses with stuff and nonsense. You have the perennial fountain flowing, and you give them ditch-water. Your Madras graduate would not touch a low-caste man, but is ready to get out of him the money for his education. . . . Our masses are gods as compared with those of other countries. This is the only country where poverty is not a crime. They are mentally and physically handsome; but we hated and hated them till they have lost faith in themselves. They think they are born slaves. Give them their rights, and let them stand on their rights. This is the glory of the American civilization. Compare the Irishman with knees bent, half-starved, with a little stick and bundle of clothes, just arrived from the ship, with what he is after a few months' stay in America. He walks boldly and bravely. He has come from a country where he was a slave, to a country where he is a brother.

A country where millions of people live on flowers of the *mohua* plant, and a million or two of Sadhus and a hundred millions or so of Brahmins suck the blood out of these poor people, without even the least effort for their amelioration—is that a country or hell? Is that a religion, or the

devil's dance? My brother, here is one thing for you to understand fully,—I have travelled all over India, and seen the country too—can there be an effect without cause?

HOW TO IMPROVE THEIR CONDITION

The one thing that is at the root of all evils in India is the condition of the poor. The poor in the West are devils; compared to them ours are angels, and it is therefore so much the easier to raise our poor. The only service to be done for our lower classes is, to give them education, to *develop their lost individuality*. That is the great task between our people and princes. Up to now nothing has been done in that direction. Priest-power and foreign conquest have trodden them down for centuries, and at last the poor of India have forgotten that they are human beings. They are to be given ideas; their eyes are to be opened to what is going on in the world around them, and then they will work out their salvation. Every nation, every man and every woman must work out their own salvation. Give them ideas—that is the only help they require, and then the rest must follow as the effect. Ours is to put the chemicals together, the crystallization comes in the law of nature. Our duty is to put ideas into their heads, they will do the rest. This is what is to be done in India. It is this idea that has been in my mind for a long time. I could not accomplish it in India, and that was the reason of my coming to this country. The great difficulty in the way of educating the poor, is this. Supposing even your Highness* opens a free school in every village, still it would do no good, for

*Written to the Maharaja of Mysore.

the poverty in India is such, that the poor boys would rather go to help their fathers in the fields, or otherwise try to make a living, than come to the school. Now if the mountain does not come to Mahomet, Mahomet must go to the mountain. If the poor boy cannot come to education, education must go to him. There are thousands of single-minded, self-sacrificing Sannyasins in our own country, going from village to village, teaching religion. If some of them can be organized as teachers of secular things also, they will go from place to place, from door to door, not only preaching but teaching also. Suppose two of these men go to a village in the evening with a camera, a globe, some maps, etc., they can teach a great deal of astronomy and geography to the ignorant. By telling stories about different nations, they can give the poor a hundred times more information through the ear than they can get in a lifetime through books. This requires an organization, which again means money. Men enough there are in India to work out this plan, but alas! they have no money. It is very difficult to set a wheel in motion, but when once set, it goes on with increasing velocity. After seeking help in my own country and failing to get any sympathy from the rich, I came over to this country through your Highness' aid. The Americans do not care a bit whether the poor of India die or live. And why should they, when our own people never think of anything but their own selfish ends?

From the day when education and culture, etc. began to spread gradually from patricians to plebeians, grew the distinction between the modern civilization as of Western countries, and the ancient civilization as of India, Egypt, Rome, etc. I see it before my eyes, a nation is advanced in proportion as

education and intelligence spread among the masses. The chief cause of India's ruin has been the monopolizing of the whole education and intelligence of the land, by dint of pride and royal authority, among a handful of men. If we are to rise again, we shall have to do it in the same way, *i.e.* by spreading education among the masses. A great fuss has been made for half a century about social reform. Travelling through various places of India these last ten years, I observed the country full of social reform associations. But I did not find one association for them, by sucking whose blood the people known as 'gentlemen,' have become and continue to be gentlemen!

Education, education, education alone! Travelling through many cities of Europe and observing in them the comforts and education of even the poor people, there was brought to my mind the state of our own people and I used to shed tears. What made the difference? Education was the answer I got. Through education, faith in one's own self, and through faith in one's own self the inherent Brahman is waking up in them, while the Brahman in us is gradually becoming dormant.

The remedy now is, the spread of education. First of all, Self-knowledge. I do not mean thereby, matted hair, staff, *Kamandalu* and mountain caves which the word suggests. What do I mean then? Cannot the knowledge by which is attained even freedom from the bondage of worldly existence, bring ordinary material prosperity? Certainly it can. . . . From the highest God to the meanest grass, the same power is present in all—whether manifested or not. We shall have to call forth that power by going from door to door.

Secondly, along with this, education has to be imparted. That is easy to

say, but how to reduce it into practice? There are thousands of unselfish, kind-hearted men in our country, who have renounced everything. In the same way as they travel about and give religious instructions without any remuneration, so at least half of them can be trained as teachers, or bearers of such education as we need most. For that, we want first of all a centre in the capital of each Presidency, from whence to spread slowly throughout the whole of India. Then, the greater part of the education of the poor should be given orally, time is not yet ripe for schools. Gradually in these main centres will be taught agriculture, industry, etc., and workshops will be established for the furtherance of arts. To sell the manufactures of these workshops in Europe and America, associations will be started like those already in existence.

My idea is to bring to the door of the meanest, the poorest, the noble ideas that the human race has developed both in and out of India, and let them think for themselves.

My whole ambition in life is to set in motion a machinery which will bring noble ideas to the door of everybody, and then let men and women settle their own fate. Let them know what our forefathers as well as other nations

have thought on the most momentous questions of life. Let them see specially what others are doing now, and then decide. We are to put the chemicals together, the crystallization will be done by nature according to her laws. Work hard, be steady and have faith in the Lord. . . . Keep the motto before you,—“Elevation of the masses without injuring the religion.”

Remember that the nation lives in the cottage. But, alas! nobody ever did anything for them. Our modern reformers are very busy about widow remarriage. Of course I am a sympathizer in every reform, but the fate of a nation does not depend upon the number of husbands their widows get, but upon the *condition of masses*. Can you raise them? Can you give them back their lost individuality without making them lose their innate spiritual nature? Can you become an occidental of occidentals in your spirit of equality, freedom, work and energy, and at the same time a Hindu to the very backbone in religious culture and instincts? This is to be done and *we will do it*. You are all *born to do it*. Have faith in yourselves, great convictions are the mothers of great deeds. Onward for ever! Sympathy for the poor, the down-trodden, even unto death—this is our motto.

(To be continued)

THREE STAGES

BY THE EDITOR

I

Man has got an inveterate tendency to take to the rôle of a teacher. One will be more eager to give advice to

others than to follow that oneself. One will more easily find fault with others than with oneself. At the bottom of all these will be found the common de-