

A brief digression may be permitted here. It may be mentioned, in passing, that the Swami and his party arrived in Pamban from Ceylon on 26 January 1897, the date which was to acquire a national significance fifty-three years later, in 1950, as the Republic Day! And in Ramnad (now, Ramanathapuram), the Raja, a disciple, a great admirer, and a helper of the Swami in his cause, in commemorating the Swami's visit to his place, erected a monument of victory, forty feet in height, on which were inscribed the words *Satyameva Jayate*, which have now become the national motto of the Republic of India!

As news reached Madras of the arrival of the Swami in India, and of his coming to Madras itself shortly, great enthusiasm prevailed for weeks in the city with eager expectation. Extensive preparations were getting ready for according a grand reception to the Swami. The streets and thoroughfares of the city were profusely and tastefully decorated. It is said that seventeen triumphal arches were erected *en route*. Mottoes of welcome, such as 'Long Live the Venerable Vivekananda!' 'Hail, Servant of God!' 'Hail, Servant of All Great Sages of the Past!' 'Hail, Harbinger of Peace!' 'Hail, Sri Ramakrishna's Worthy Son!' 'Welcome, Prince of Men!' etc., were in evidence all over the city. The Madras newspapers were filled with editorials concerning the Swami and the grand preparations that were going on for giving the Swami a warm and worthy reception befitting the great city. On the day of his arrival, representatives of *The Hindu*, *The Madras Mail*, etc., met him at Chingleput and travelled with him to Madras for having interviews with the Swami.

The Madras Times, *inter alia*, wrote as follows :

'For the past few weeks, the Hindu public of Madras have been most anxiously expecting the arrival of Swami Vivekananda, the great Hindu monk of world-wide fame. At the present moment, his name is on everybody's lips. In the schools, in the colleges,

in the High Court, on the marina, and in the streets and bazaars of Madras, hundreds of eager persons may be seen asking everybody, "When will the Swami Vivekananda come?" . . . It was Madras that first recognised the superior merits of the Swami and equipped him for his journey to Chicago. Madras will now have again the honour of welcoming the undoubtedly great man who has done so much to raise the prestige of his motherland. Four years ago, when the Swami came here, he was practically an obscure person.' Between 1893 and 1897, he had leapt from obscurity to world-wide celebrity, having done yeoman service to his country in opening the eyes of the Western world to the culture and thought of India.

At long last, in the first week of February 1897, the long-awaited day arrived. The Swami alighted at the Egmore Station (Madras), and was accorded a very enthusiastic and affectionate welcome by the leading citizens of Madras. From the early hours of the morning, the city wore a festive air. Crowds were thronging all along the procession route — from the station to 'Castle Kernan' (popularly known as 'Ice House'). ('Ice House' has now been renamed 'Vivekananda House.' To the right of this House now stands an imposing bronze statue of Swami Vivekananda in his *parivrājaka* posture — erected during the Swami's birth centenary year in 1963 — with staff in hand and looking towards the Bay of Bengal). 'Castle Kernan' was the residence of Sri Biligiri Iyengar, Attorney at that time. At the appointed hour, the procession started from the railway station. Throughout on the way, the Swami was received and hailed with thundering applause and with an enthusiasm unprecedented in the annals of Madras. The horses of the Swami's carriage were unharnessed, and the citizens of Madras took their places! All along the way, there was a perpetual shower of flowers at every point and under the 'Welcome' arches. The procession route lay 'along the Napier Park, *via* Chintadripet, thence turning on the

Mount Road opposite the Government House, wending thence along the Wallaja Road, the Chepauk, and finally across the Pycrofts Road to the South Beach.'

A leading paper of Madras, describing the Swami's entry into the city, wrote: 'The receptions accorded to the Swami at the several places of halt were no less than royal ovations. . . . In Chintadripet and elsewhere, camphor offerings were made to him (as are done to a deity while on procession in the streets); and at the place where he is encamped ('Castle Kernan'), the ladies of the household received him with *arati*, or the ceremony of waving lights, incense, and flowers as before an image of God. . . .

'Never since its earliest days has Madras witnessed such an enthusiastic reception accorded to anyone, European or Indian. Of all the official receptions that were held in Madras, none could equal the one given to Swami Vivekananda. Such an ovation has not been witnessed in Madras within the memory of the oldest man, and we dare say that the scenes of today will remain for ever in the memory of the present generation.'

Some prominent citizens met together soon after and drew up a programme for the Swami during his stay in the city — to regulate the presentation of addresses by different organizations as well as the addresses to be delivered by the Swami. It was then decided that the Swami's first public appearance and address was to be in reply to the address on behalf of the people of Madras. Following this, there were to be four more lectures by the Swami, devoted to a comprehensive and detailed exposition of his message to the world and to his motherland, setting forth the means and methods for creating a national spiritual revival in India conforming to the changed conditions prevailing in the country. Accordingly, with the approval of the Swami, the following subjects were chosen for his lectures: (1) My Plan of Campaign, (2) Vedanta in Its Application to Indian

Life, (3) The Sages of India, and (4) The Future of India. Besides these four, the Swami also consented to deliver an address at the Triplicane Literary Society, which had introduced him to the public four years earlier, the subject, being 'The Work before Us.' The four lectures were delivered by the Swami on February 9, 11, 13 and 14—two in the Victoria Hall, one in the Pachaiyappa's, and one in Harmston's Circus Pavilion. The Chennapuri Annadana Samajam, Madras, an institution engaged in charitable works, requested the Swami to preside over the Annual Meeting of the Samajam, with which he complied. There he spoke on 'Charity', pointing out the superiority of the Hindu idea of charity to that of the legalized methods of other faiths and nations. He also paid a visit to the rooms of the Madras Social Reform Association. All the lectures given by the Swami in Madras, including the one which was in reply to the address presented to him on behalf of the people of the city, and which could not be completed because of the exuberance of enthusiasm of the people on that occasion, and had to be cut short on that account — all these lectures, numbering six, have been included in the third volume of his *Complete Works* under the section 'Lectures from Colombo to Almora.'

On the day the public address was presented to him by the citizens of Madras, at the scene in front of the Victoria Hall, the venue for the function, the enthusiasm of the people broke all records defying description. There were cries of 'open air meeting' from the concourse of people gathered there. The formality of presenting the address was done within the precincts of the Hall, but the Swami's heart was touched by the enthusiasm of the milling crowds outside. He felt he could not disappoint the countless young men assembled outside. So he came out of the Hall to meet and mingle with the throng, which broke into a thundering applause. The noise was so deafening that the Swami could not make himself heard. He got on top of

a Madras coach, standing nearby, and addressed the huge gathering in the 'Gita fashion', as he himself called it! He made a brief speech on that occasion, thanking the citizens for extending to him such a warm-hearted, kind, genuine, and enthusiastic welcome. He did not chide the crowd at all for this show of inordinate enthusiasm. On the contrary, he was immensely pleased with it. He, however, took the opportunity to point out, in this very first lecture, 'that as each nation has one ideal as its vitality, as each nation has one particular groove which is to become its own, so religion is the peculiarity of the growth of the Indian mind.' 'Here, in India, it is religion that forms the very core of the national heart. It is the backbone, the bed-rock, the foundation upon which the national edifice has been built. Politics, power, and even intellect form a secondary consideration here. Religion, therefore, is the one consideration of India.' As he went on thus for sometime more, the crowd became so unmanageable that the Swami cut short his speech abruptly, exhorting the people to keep alive their enthusiasm. In concluding that brief speech, he said: 'Let not the fire die out. We want to work out great things in India. For that, I require your help; such enthusiasm is necessary. . . . I will reserve my speech for some other occasion. I thank you very much for your enthusiastic welcome.'

The first major speech of the Swami in the city significantly carries the caption 'My Plan of Campaign.' It sounds like the language of a warrior; and the Swami was a 'warrior' not for the conquest of 'pelf,' but for the conquest of 'self.' He was out to establish his religion on purer and healthier grounds, shorn of all its encrustations and superstitions — what he called 'Aggressive Hinduism.' The spirit of the Swami's mind and thought at that time was reflected in his Madras lectures. It is not necessary to reproduce them here either in full or in parts, as they are all already published in his *Complete Works*, Volume III; and in a book separately issued under the

title *Lectures from Colombo to Almora*. For our purposes here, however, we may at random select quotations from them, which point to the way the Swami was thinking then, to get a working knowledge of the main ideas of those lectures. To quote him: 'My plan is to follow the ideas of the great ancient Masters' (*Complete Works*, III, p. 220). 'To the reformers, I will point out that I am a greater reformer than any one of them. They want to reform only little bits. I want root-and-branch reform. . . . Theirs is the method of destruction, mine is that of construction. I do not believe in reform, I believe in growth' (*ibid.*, p. 213). 'In India, religious life forms the centre, the keynote of the whole music of national life; and if any nation attempts to throw off its national vitality — the direction which has become its own through the transmission of centuries — that nation dies, if it succeeds in the attempt' (*ibid.*, p. 220). 'So, in India, social reform has to be preached by showing how much more spiritual a life the new system will bring; and politics has to be preached by showing how much it will improve the one thing that the nation wants — its spirituality' (*ibid.*, p. 221). 'Before flooding India with socialistic or political ideas, first deluge the land with spiritual ideas. The first work that demands our attention is that 'the most wonderful truths confined in our Upanishads, in our scriptures, in our Puranas, must be brought out from the books, brought out from the monasteries, brought out from the forests, . . . and scattered broadcast all over the land' (*ibid.*). 'My plan is to start institutions in India to train our young men as preachers of the truths of our scriptures in India and outside India' (*ibid.*, p. 223). 'Make your nerves strong. What we want is muscles of iron and nerves of steel. . . . It is a man-making religion that we want. It is man-making theories that we want. It is man-making education all round that we want. And here is the test of truth—anything that makes you weak physically, intellectually, and spiritually, reject as poison. . . . Truth is

strengthening. Truth is purity; truth is all-knowledge' (*ibid.*, pp. 224-25). 'The truths of the Upanishads are before you. Take them up, live up to them, and the salvation of India will be at hand' (*ibid.*, p. 225).

Referring to nationalism or patriotism, the Swami, in substance, said: 'Nationalism of a purely agitational pattern cannot carry us far. With patriotism must be associated a real feeling for others, a practical solution of the problems in hand, and steadfastness, sincerity, and purity of motive.' Again, nationalism must not be equated with narrow-mindedness leading to an insular way of life and outlook. 'To become broad, to go out, to amalgamate, to universalize, is the end of our aims' (*ibid.*, p. 271). Warning that none shall criticize this society of India, the Swami proclaimed: 'This national ship has been terrying millions and millions of souls across the waters of life. . . . But today, perhaps, through our own fault, this boat has become a little damaged, has sprung a leak; and would you therefore curse it? Is it fit that you stand up and pronounce malediction upon it? If there are holes in this national ship, . . . let us go and stop the holes. . . . We will make a plug of our brains and put them into the ship, but condemn it never' (*ibid.*, p. 227).

Speaking of caste and its privileges, the Swami remarked that by the mere fact of birth in a certain caste, one cannot, and should not, claim privileges. He said: 'Caste is good. That is the only natural way of solving life. Men must form themselves into groups, and you cannot get rid of that. Wherever you go, there will be caste. But that does not mean that there should be these privileges' (*ibid.*, p. 245). He wanted that all should get an opportunity to study the great Vedanta, for he says: 'These conceptions of the Vedanta must come out, must remain not only in the forest, not only in the cave, but they must come out to work at the bar and the bench, in the pulpit, and in the cottage of the poor man, with the fishermen that are catching fish, and with the students that are studying' (*ibid.*,

p. 245). 'If the fisherman thinks that he is the Spirit, he will be a better fisherman; if the student thinks he is the Spirit, he will be a better student, . . . and the result will be that the castes will remain for ever, . . . and what will go will be these privileges' (*ibid.*).

Himself raising the problem of improving the condition of the women of India, the Swami asked: 'Am I a woman that you ask me that question again and again? Who are you to solve women's problems? Are you the Lord God that you should rule over every widow and every woman? Hands off! They will solve their own problems' (*ibid.*, p. 246). Give them good education, he would say, on our national lines, and they would solve their own problems. Even a remote suggestion as to the superiority of men to women would upset the Swami much, and he would come down upon anyone suggesting it, like an avalanche.

The Swami had his own idea of education suited to the needs of our country. He said in his lecture on 'The Future of India': 'Education is not the amount of information that is put into your brain and runs riot there, undigested, all your life. We must have life-building, man-making, character-making assimilation of ideas. . . . If education is identical with information, the libraries are the greatest sages in the world, and encyclopaedias are the *rishis*. The ideal, therefore, is that we must have the whole education of our country, spiritual and secular, in our own hands; and it must be on national lines, through national methods as far as practical' (*ibid.*, p. 302).

Similarly, Swamiji has offered his own solutions to the several problems confronting the country at that time, social, economic, political, and spiritual. These are to be found scattered all over the eight volumes of his *Complete Works*. A discussion of those problems and the solutions thereto offered by the Swami is beyond the scope of this article.

It is significant that, in 1897, the Swami charged his audience, 'For the next fifty years, this alone shall be our keynote — this, our great Mother India. Let all other vain gods