

# SOME ASPECTS OF SWAMI VIVEKANANDA'S MESSAGE

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[Substance of a lecture delivered at the Madras Vivekananda College Silver Jubilee Celebration in September, 1971.]

ON the occasion of this Silver Jubilee, I feel it will not be out of place for me to highlight before you some of the great human and spiritual values embodied in the life and teachings of Swami Vivekananda whose name is associated with this College. Combining in himself the roles of a national leader and of a world teacher (Acharya) his lifework was to bridge the gulf between worldly and transcendental values, between nationalism and internationalism, between the East and the West, between science and spirituality, between reason and religion.

Coming to specific considerations, if there is any value which he cherished and spoke about wherever he went, it is strength — strength not of the Nietzsche's super-man, which is strength to bully others and lord over them, but strength contemplated in the Upanishadic passage 'This Atman cannot be attained by the weak.' This conception of strength does not exclude physical strength born of good feeding and ample exercise of the muscles; for the Swami once declared to a physically degenerate Indian nation, 'You will be nearer to Heaven through foot-ball than through the study of the Gita.' And he himself was a good athlete who travelled all over India on foot and had no hesitation to swim about 'three furlongs of distance across the turbulent sea to the last rock of India at the Cape Comorin. But physical strength has to be supplemented by the intellectual strength born of a sound education, which in the words of Russel, should generate in man intelligence, courage, sensitiveness and tolerance. But strength in its highest form can arise only by the apprehension of the unity of all existence, which is the supreme Godhead. From this

results universal love, and established in universal love man attains to perfect fearlessness, which is but another name for strength in its highest form.

Every form of weakness he despised, as in his eyes weakness was synonymous with sin. This may surprise many at first, but its meaning is obvious from his conception of strength explained above, which is the very opposite of Nietzsche's conception of it. His view on weakness does not in the least imply callousness to the sufferings of others. A sense of weakness only makes a man more and more self-centred and selfish, seeking security for himself always. If he has any sympathy for others, it will only be a sentiment having no practical value. Only strength born out of a sense of unity of all existence can express itself as effective and helpful sympathy.

In everyday life he wanted strength to be expressed as self-confidence and self-respect; and according to him no man who had no confidence in himself can attain to real faith in God.

Another great value, a collective value, for which he stood was patriotism, and here too his ideal of it was essentially an expression of his basic spirituality. Patriotism is often clubbed with politics in the imagination of Indians who carry the impression of the days of the pre-independence national struggle in India, though the situation has changed very much today. Swami Vivekananda was no politician in any sense of the term, but yet he was a great nationalist and national leader in whom the flame of patriotism burned as a pure passion undimmed by the smoke of communalism, regionalism, linguism or casteism. The welfare and uplift of all parts of India

and all sections of its people were his special concern, which made him proclaim in one of his writings : O India ! forget not that the ideal of thy womanhood is Sita, Savitri, Damayanti ; forget not that the God thou worshippest is the great ascetic of ascetics, the all-renouncing Sankara, the Lord of Uma ; forget not that thy marriage, thy wealth, thy life are not for sense pleasures, are not for thy individual personal happiness ; forget not that thou art born as a sacrifice to the Mother's altar ; forget not that thy social order is but the reflex of the infinite universal Motherhood ; forget not that the lower classes, the ignorant, the poor, the illiterate, the cobbler, the sweeper, are thy flesh and blood, thy brothers. Thou brave one, be bold, take courage, be proud that thou art an Indian — and proudly proclaim, 'I am an Indian, every Indian is my brother, every Indian is my life. India's Gods and Goddesses are my God, India's society is the cradle of my infancy, the pleasure garden of my youth, the sacred heaven, the Varanasi of my old age.' Say brother — 'The soil of India is my highest heaven, the good of India is my good' and repeat and pray day and night — 'O Thou Lord of Gauri, O Thou Mother of the Universe, vouchsafe manliness into me, O Thou mother of Strength, take away my weakness, take away my unmanliness and make me a Man.'

While the Swami thus stood for an ardent, passionate and comprehensive ideal of patriotism, his love of India was never chauvinistic. As a teacher of the unity of all existence, his love of India was a part of his love for the world community as a whole. He loved India not merely because it was his country, but because he believed India has a special contribution to make for the welfare of the world as a whole. Nature, the Swami observes, effaces an organism and a people when they cease to fulfil any useful purpose in her economy. They atrophy or decay and die. The great nations and empires of the ancient world have passed away from history only for this reason, and if India among them has survived through millenniums, it is only because

she has yet to contribute something vital to the life of the world community. India has played the part of the spiritual teacher of mankind all through the ages, and the retention of this capacity upto the present day, is, according to the Swami, the cause of India's survival through the ages in spite of her passing through vicissitudes that could have completely effaced her like many other ancient civilizations and peoples, from the face of the earth.

Many a person, disillusioned by the degradation of character and outlook in post-independent India, might question the above generalisation, and express doubts as to whether India has any moral or spiritual force at all of the kind that the Swami contemplated. But as a result of his intimate contact with the Indian people at all levels during his days as a wandering ascetic and his deep study of world history and culture, the Swami's conviction in this respect was firm and uncompromising. He was convinced that India has developed a special aptitude or capacity to actualise spiritual ideals — i.e., the psychic requirement to commune with the Infinite and the Absolute and be poised in an understanding of the unity of all existence.

The ultimate aim of national uplift and reconstruction in India should be the fulfilment of this international purpose, and the improvement of the material conditions of life in this country is the first and a very necessary step for this. For if poverty, ill-health and political and economic slavery continued in this country, the mind and body of India cannot become a fit medium for the expression of her spiritual potentialities, and her national and international purposes will be defeated.

Therefore in the Swami's view economic prosperity, improved standards of living, establishment of an egalitarian society and all other attempts at nation-building and at the achievement of a socialised economy are not ends in themselves, but are only significant to the extent that these enable the Indian people to express their spiritual potentialities and to become a highly serviceable member of the

world community. There is no use in casting India in the mould of a Russia, or a China, or a United States or in converting her into an international bully.

It may perhaps be news to many that long before our political leaders began to speak of socialism, Swami Vivekananda declared that he was a socialist by conviction, but he added that it was so not because he considered it a perfect system but because all others had been tried and found wanting, and the new ideology therefore deserved a trial. But socialism in his eyes had to be built not on the dialectical materialism of Marx but on the spiritual vision of the unity of all existence proclaimed in the Upanishads.

It will thus be seen that patriotism, internationalism and spiritualism were in him allied forms of love, closely intertwined, and integrated into a powerful passion that expressed itself now as the love of God and next as the love of humanity. Nationalism, internationalism and spiritualism all mingled harmoniously in

him into a luminous charm which accounts for the attractions he holds for persons of diverse outlooks.

Let us therefore focus our attention on the three fundamental loves he stood for :

1. Love India, our motherland, as a single entity, as one people indivisibly knit together for weal or for woe, and not as different states, linguistic units, communities or castes.

2. Recognise that our country is a part of the world community and that the purpose of our national existence is the service of that community through the interpretation of spiritual values.

3. Realize that all beings, living and non-living, planets, galaxies, mountains, seas, men, animals, super-human beings — in fact all the diversified objects of this immeasurably vast universe are but the expressions of a central underlying spiritual unity, which is the Supreme Spirit.

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## THE ROUSING CALL

SWAMI BODHASWARUPANANDA

[Substance of a talk given at Sri Krishna Temple, Avadi, on the occasion of Sri Krishna Janmashtami on August 14, 1971.]

SRI KRISHNA Janmashtami is a very sacred occasion for all Hindus. Hindu scriptures tell us that about 4500 years ago on this day, the Supreme Being took birth on earth as Sri Krishna, the Saviour of souls. So the Janmashtami brings with it the glad tidings of spiritual redemption. On this blessed day devotees who contemplate on the Lord who is of all auspicious qualities get imbued with renewed spiritual inspiration.

It is good and helpful to contemplate on Him through an effort at understanding what His vital message to mankind is — the message that whips up the slumbering soul on the snow-field of worldliness to saving spiritual activity. That message is contained in the

exhortation He gave out to Arjuna in His Song Celestial :

*Tasmādutthiṣṭa kaunteya  
yuddhāya kṛta niscayaḥ*

Therefore arise, O Arjuna,  
Resolved to fight.

Baffled by bitter reverses of luck on life's battlefield, confused and confounded by adversities of all sorts, the soul of man stays stunned! Is there no hope? Is there not a chance of victory in its struggle for freedom, its search for peace? The human soul's efforts towards the attainment of happiness-everlasting in this relative world seems to be a game