

Vivekānanda

The Citadel of
POWER
and
STRENGTH



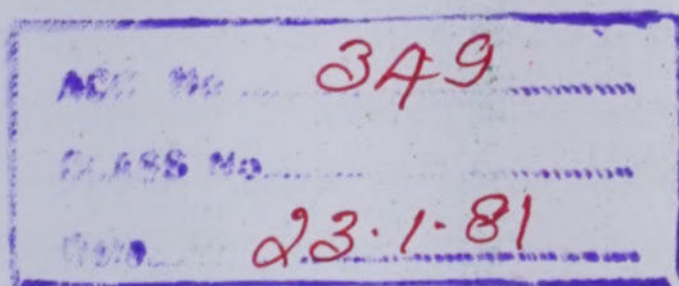
by
Swami Harshananda

Vivekānanda

The Citadel of Power and Strength



Swami Harshananda



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Preface

Vivekānanda is adored and admired by the poor and the ignorant—if they have come to know something about him—because his heart bled for them.

Vivekānanda is adored and admired by the rich—if they have come to know something about him—because they now believe that they are only trustees of God's wealth.

Vivekānanda is adored and admired by the youth—if they have come to know something about him—because he inspired them for doing great things in life so as to leave a mark behind.

Vivekānanda is adored and admired by the old—if they have come to know something about him—because he helps them to attain inner peace.

Vivekānanda is adored and admired by the scientists—if they have come to know something about him—because he had a scintillatingly scientific mind that would never accept anything without convincing proof.

Vivekānanda is adored and admired by the

artists—if they have come to know something about him—because he was an adept in the field of music, fine-arts and also an art-critic.

Vivekānanda is adored and admired by the pundits—if they have come to know something about him—because of his admirable adroitness in presenting even complicated philosophic tenets in a simple and direct language.

Secular intellectuals can admire him because he was a humanist. Spiritually inclined persons can adore him because he was a saint par excellence. All men and women can admire and adore him because he was a MAN among men, endowed with an adamant will, as also a tender heart.

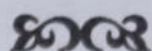
This was Vivekānanda who inspired—and still inspires—many an ordinary soul to aspire after extraordinary achievements in life.

This small book on that great man, who was a citadel of power and strength, is an attempt to introduce his life and philosophy, especially to our youth. If it can rouse their dormant **power** and get it manifested as **strength** to achieve something worthwhile in life, our task is done!

S. H.

Contents

Preface	3
Key to Transliteration and Pronunciation	6
1. The Descent	7
2. Child Prodigy	9
3. The Restless Search	10
4. The Search Ends	11
5. The Struggle Begins	13
6. 'Keep the Flock Together'	15
7. The Broken House and the Unbroken Spirit	17
8. Unknown Expedition for a Known Destination	19
9. Future Revealed	22
10. The East Storms the West	25
11. Hectic Tours to Transmit Tranquillity	27
12. Back to the Motherland	29
13. Sleeping Giant Awakened	31
14. Mission Accomplished	33
15. Pilgrimages and Tours	35
16. The Ascent	37
17. Character and Personality	39
18. The Philosophy of Vivekānanda	42
19. His Special Contribution	44
20. Epilogue	48



Key to Transliteration and Pronunciation

	<i>Sounds like</i>		<i>Sounds like</i>
अ	a-o in son	ड	ḍ-d in den
आ	ā-a in master	ढ	ḍh-dh in godhood
इ	i-i in if	ण	ṇ-n in under
ई	ī-ee in feel	त	t-t in French
उ	u-u in full	थ	th-th in thumb
ऊ	ū-oo in boot	द	d-th in then
ऋ	r-somewhat between r and ri	ध	dh-the in breathe
ए	e-ay in May	न	n-n in not
ऐ	ai-y in my	प	p-p in pen
ओ	o-o in oh	फ	ph-ph in loop-hole
औ	au-ow in now	ब	b-b in bag
क	k-k in keen	भ	bh-bh in abhor
ख	kh-ckh in blockhead	म	m-m in mother
ग	g-g (hard) in go	य	y-y in yard
घ	gh-gh in log-hut	र	r-r in run
ङ	ṅ-ng in singer	ल	l-l in luck
च	c-ch in chain	व	v-v in avert
छ	ch-chh in catch him	श	ś-sh in reich (German)
ज	j-j in judge	ष	ṣ-sh in show
झ	jh-dgeh in hedgehog	स	s-in sun
ञ	ñ-n (somewhat) as in French	ह	h-in hot
ट	ṭ-t in ten	ळ	ḷ
ठ	ṭh-th in ant-hill		ṁ-m in sum
			: ḥ-h in half

1

The Descent

An overwhelming number of human beings are just products of history. But, once in a while, the world throws up from its bosom, such extraordinary geniuses who *create* history. Nay, they *are* history, if we redefine history as 'his story!' It is the story of such men—the salt of the earth—who shape the destinies of millions of human beings for millenniums, that is real history!

Rāmas and Kṛṣṇas of the most ancient period, Buddhas and Christs of the remote past, were such epoch-making personalities. To this list should be added Rāmakṛṣṇa and Vivekānanda of the recent past, the movement in whose names is still gaining greater and greater momentum.

As per one of the profound mystical visions of Rāmakṛṣṇa, Vivekānanda was one of the Seven Great Sages who descended to this earth out of his own free-will, to help mankind to rediscover its inherent divinity.

The earthly advent of Narendranāth Datta—that was his premonastic name—took place on the 12th January 1863 at Calcutta (now Kolkata). His father Viśvanātha Datta, was an attorney. Bhuvaneśvarī Devī, his mother, was a highly cultured and pious lady.

Under their loving care, Narendra grew up into a fine boy.

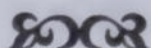


Child Prodigy

Even in his early boyhood, Narendra exhibited many extraordinary traits and talents indicating his future greatness. Exceptionally brilliant intelligence, a prodigious memory, a generous heart that felt for the poor and the downtrodden, absolute fearlessness, utter contempt for superstitious beliefs and a regal bearing were conspicuous in him by their compelling presence.

Though he would often neglect attending the school regularly due to his tremendous attraction for manly sports and voracious reading habits, he would invariably pass the examinations creditably.

By the time he reached the college for higher studies, he had already mastered many a difficult text of Western philosophy and logic.



The Restless Search

Delving into deep meditation—even from early boyhood days—was as natural to him as a fish swimming in deep waters.

Though meditation had brought him some inner peace, the intellectual restlessness brought about by an innate desire to know God—if He really existed—and the various metaphysical treatises (bordering on agnosticism or even atheism) he had thoroughly gone through, increased to such an extent that he started visiting any and every person considered as or appearing to be a holy man or a man of God. Neither anyone of them, nor even the well-known leaders of the Brahmo Samāj, could whet his spiritual appetite by giving a direct and unambiguous, positive, answer.



The Search Ends

Rāmakṛṣṇa (A. D. 1836-1886)—more well-known as the Paramahansa—had already become a household name in Calcutta. Though Narendra had heard about him (and had also seen him once in the house of a devotee at Calcutta), he had not cared to go and meet him, thinking that he was an unlettered rustic and hence it was not worth seeing him. However, persuaded by Rāmacandra Datta (A. D. 1851-1899), a close relative (of Narendra) as also a disciple of Rāmakṛṣṇa, he decided to go to Dakṣiṇeśvar and meet the saint.

This first encounter, wherein Narendra got a direct answer in the affirmative, for his (eternal) direct question—‘Sir! Have you seen God?’—not only thrilled him but also confused him. It confused him because of the great Master Rāmakṛṣṇa’s strange behaviour of addressing him as Nārāyaṇa (Lord Viṣṇu), shedding tears profusely and talking to him as if he had known him intimately for ages!

Whereas the Master was talking from the standpoint of his high mystical experience, Narendra was too dumbfounded to understand it.

Thus the search for a true godman ended for Narendra.



5

The Struggle Begins

It is one thing to know that the godman has truly realised God and entirely another thing to be trained by him to get the same experience oneself!

The next five years were a period of intense training by the great guru, of the great disciple.

While the former wanted to cast the latter in a supermould, to carry on and continue his work even after he was gone, the latter fought every inch of his way before accepting it, unless duly convinced.

The period of apprenticeship often appeared more like a battle between equals than a training session. On one side was a well-educated strong young man, equipped with a razor-sharp intellect, bolstered by a deep knowledge of Western philosophy, science and logic. On the other side was an uneducated brāhmaṇa priest from a backward village of the 19th century Bengal, whose one and only

asset was the constant companionship of Kālī, the Divine Mother, whose very existence was doubted and the image, detested, by the likes of Narendra.

Ultimately it was Rāmakṛṣṇa that triumphed in the war though he did lose some battles, the battles of wits. In such cases, what he could not achieve through logic, he successfully did by magic, by his magic touch, imparting instant experience of the Divine.

Domestic tragedies like the sudden demise of his father and the consequent penury of the family as also the desertion by his (so-called) friends, made Narendra surrender himself totally at the feet of his guru, whose love and faith had, all along, remained absolutely unshaken.

During this period, a direct, most wondrous, experience of Mother Kālī, vouchsafed by the grace of the guru, put an end to all the doubts and vacillations of the disciple. His conversion or transformation was now complete.



‘Keep the Flock Together’

During Rāmakṛṣṇa’s stay at the temple garden of Dakṣiṇeśvar, the Brāhmo Movement started originally by Rājā Rām-mohan Roy (A.D. 1772-1833) was at its zenith. It is a strange irony that an important leader of this protestant movement against traditional or orthodox Hinduism—Keśab Candra Sen (A.D. 1838-1884)—became instrumental in publicising the greatness of the Paramahansa of Dakṣiṇeśvar, thereby bringing the cream of ‘young Bengal’ (educated youth of Bengal) in great numbers to one who was the very antithesis of all for which the Brāhmo Movement stood!

Quite a few of these young men became his ardent disciples, deeply interested in totally dedicating themselves to spiritual pursuits, by adopting the monastic life.

Rāmakṛṣṇa trained them so adroitly that each one of them got not only general guidance but also the teachings particularly suited to him.

When he fell ill due to cancer of the throat in the middle of A. D. 1885 and later was completely bedridden, he was moved to a house first in Śyāmpukūr (Shyamapukur) and later, to a spacious bungalow with an extensive garden in Kāśīpūr (Cossipore).

It was here, that the great Master bound his young disciples—who were serving him day and night by turns—into a well-knit body of future monastics, with Narendra as their undisputed leader.

After imparting detailed instructions to the leader as to the continuation of his work and commanding him to 'keep the flock together,' the great Master ascended to his heavenly abode on the 16th August 1886, the day he himself had chosen to depart from this world.





Vivekananda in London, December 1896



Vivekananda in London, 1896

The Broken House and the Unbroken Spirit

As ordained by his Master, Narendra arranged to rent a broken and highly dilapidated house at Barānagar (in Calcutta) for the stay of all the young men chosen by him for the monastic life. This was the first monastery of the Ramakrishna Order. In fact, during his life-time itself—probably in January 1886—the Master had distributed with his own hands, ochre robes to twelve of these young men. They now formed the nucleus of the Ramakrishna Order of monks.

Under the leadership of Narendra, all of them formally embraced monastic life with proper vows and new monastic names. Narendra is supposed to have adopted the new name Vividiṣānanda though he would sometimes change it to Saccidānanda during the itinerant days so as not to be found out by his brother disciples. However, he later on assumed the name Vivekānanda permanently.

Though these young monks had to live in a god-forsaken place infested with poisonous reptiles outside and a ramshackle roof on their heads, their spirit was unbroken and the determination to realise the goal of their life, adamant.

Spurred by the age-old urge of a saṁnyāsin to lead a wandering life, depending entirely on God, the young recluses left the monastery one by one. Only Śaśi (now Rāmakṛṣṇānanda) stayed put, to take care of the relics of his Master housed in this monastery and care for the other brothers who cared to stay.

Vivekānanda was no exception to this 'mad' urge. After a few short sojourns here and there, he left the Math as an itinerant monk, this time to closely observe and study India in all her aspects.



Unknown Expedition for a Known Destination

Apparently, Vivekānanda's expedition was into the unknown or the little-known facts of India—its land, its people, its religion and culture, its hopes and aspirations, its glories and mistakes, its miseries and sufferings; in short, India in its totality, at first-hand.

This was absolutely necessary for him to know at first-hand—even as a doctor had to know all about his patient before prescribing his remedies—since he had been specially ordained by his Master to work vigorously for the upliftment of his motherland.

Thus it was that, though his expedition was into the unknown, his destination or the final goal was clearly known.

Vivekānanda's experiences as an itinerant monk were as diverse as they were direct too. He could see India's people and their life at close quarters. Now in the palaces of the kings

or the mansions of the rich, and, the next day sleeping in the cottages of the poor who could hardly manage a square meal per day or with their animals in the sheds. Vivekānanda could realise how poverty, ignorance and squalour were everywhere, and how the common masses who had been oppressed and exploited for ages, had become next door neighbours to brutes.

However, to his pleasant surprise, he discovered that the true spirit of religion (as he called it) was still very much present in the Indian blood. He discovered that religion was the backbone of India and that she could rise (or had to be raised) only through that.

After visiting the Himālayan shrines, travelling through the fertile Indo-Gangetic plains, meandering through the Rājasthān deserts in scorching sun and the Deccan plateau, he finally landed in the Kanyākumārī temple town (known as the Cape Comorin then).

Offering his obeisance first in the shrine he went to the sea-shore where the Indian ocean absorbs into its bosom, the Bay of Bengal

and the Arabian sea. Seeing two rocks in the ocean at a short distance and unable to withstand the temptation of their call as it were, he swam to the bigger one and sat there in a restful state, gradually gliding into deep meditation.



Future Revealed

By now he had seen enough of India at first-hand. He had intuited its glorious past. He had observed its present degradation. He had discovered its causes and also devised the solutions. The only thing that had to be done now was their implementation.

Earlier, during his travels through Gujarat and Madras (now Chennai), some friends and devotees had suggested, nay, had even pressurised him, that he should go to America and attend the Parliament of Religions. Though he was receptive to the idea, he was not sure whether it had his Master's approval. His own vision of Rāmakṛṣṇa walking over the sea towards the West and beckoning him to follow, as also a similar one vouchsafed to Śrī Sārādādevī (A. D. 1853-1920), the divine consort of the Master, removed all doubts from his mind.

His plan of action was now clear and vivid

in his mind. He would go to America, earn money by the power of his brains, return to India and build an organisation of monks to serve the poor and the downtrodden. Through the twin ideals of renunciation and service to mankind, he would attempt to raise India not only to its past glory but even beyond that!

Spurred and enthused by this vision, and, with an unshakable faith in his guru, he returned to Madras. After visiting Khetri in Rajasthan whose king was his disciple, he set sail for America from Bombay on the 31st May 1893.

His disciples at Madras as also the Mahārājā of Khetri provided him with the necessary money and baggage.

Travelling via Ceylon (now Srilanka), China and Japan, he finally reached Chicago on the 30th July, since that was the place where the Parliament of Religions was scheduled to be held.

However, he was shocked to learn that the Parliament would be held only in September.

With help coming from the most unexpected quarters, he shifted to Boston—since it was less expensive—and returned to Chicago on time to attend the Parliament as an official delegate of Hinduism from India.



The East Storms the West

The Parliament of Religions was held from the 11th to the 27th of September 1893 in the Hall of Columbus, as a part of the World's Columbian Exposition.

On the inaugural day, Vivekānanda, who had been seated on the vast dais along with a host of delegates from different parts of the world, representing various religions, was a little awed at the great crowd and the august occasion.

However, when he rose to speak, almost towards the end of the day, remembering Mother Sarasvatī, the goddess of learning, he was a totally transfigured person. The very first words he uttered, a short address of just five words—'Sisters and Brothers of America!' electrified the audience (a huge mass of humanity) into a thunderous clapping session lasting for over two minutes!

Obviously, the East had stormed the citadel of the West in a matter of a few seconds!

It was a short talk, but scintillating with the spirit of universality, perfectly in tune with the ethos of the Parliament. It stressed the universal spiritual truth that all religions, whether crooked or straight, would ultimately lead to the same Godhead.

In an instant, the simple monk with a begging bowl, had become the man of the hour, the uncrowned king of countless admirers.



Hectic Tours to Transmit Tranquillity

The Master had wanted him to become like a huge banyan tree giving shelter to thousands in its protective shade, rather than be a recluse interested only in his own liberation. The time for it had arrived now.

During the period September 1893 to August 1895, Vivekānanda had a hectic time visiting places, giving lectures and parlour talks, granting personal interviews, taking classes for earnest students of Vedānta, addressing the gathering at well-known universities as also exchange ideas with the best brains of America like Prof. William James (A. D. 1842-1910), Prof. J. H. Wright, Robert Ingersoll (A. D. 1833-1899) and others.

It was during this time (June 1895) that he delivered his now famous *Inspired Talks* to a small but serious group of twelve disciples at Miss Dutcher's cottage in the Thousand Island Park.

As a result of his tireless efforts through

such teaching and preaching, the Americans were able to understand and appreciate Hinduism better thereby abandoning many a misconception, dispelled by his forceful expositions.

His unexpected presence and the spectacular success in America often led to persecution and even character assassination, by certain Christian zealots as well as some of his own jealous countrymen. However, the vigorous defence put up by his western disciples silenced them.

He visited England also during the period September 1895 up to April 1896. Here too his success was remarkable. And, what is more, he made a few excellent disciples like Mr. and Mrs. Sevier, J. J. Goodwin (A. D. 1870-1898) and Miss Margaret Noble (Sister Niveditā) (A. D. 1867-1911).

He also had the opportunity of meeting Prof. Max Muller (at Oxford in England) (A. D. 1823-1900) and Prof. Deussen (at Kiel in Germany) (A. D. 1845-1919).



Back to the Motherland

After laying a firm foundation for his work in America and England, and placing Svāmī Sāradānanda (A. D. 1865-1927) and Abhedānanda (A. D. 1866-1939) in charge of the work, Vivekānanda returned to India, along with Mr. and Mrs. Savier as also J. J. Goodwin, via Ceylon. He arrived at Colombo on the 15th January 1897 to a tumultuous welcome by a sea of humanity.

Then, travelling through the various cities and towns of the Madras Presidency (now Tamil Nadu) he arrived in Madras.

Here he delivered about six lectures to mammoth audiences—which the city had never witnessed earlier—each scintillating with the power and the pride of Indian nationalism.

After acceding to the request of the local devotees and admirers to start a centre of his work at Madras, he sailed to Calcutta, his hometown, reaching there on the 19th February 1897.

The city of Calcutta gave a fitting reception to the Son of the Soil.

During his long absence, the Math had been shifted from Baranagore to Alambazar in 1892 and later, to the garden house of Nīlāmbar Mukherjī in 1897.





Now began another hectic period in Vivekānanda's life.

His talks in America were aimed at vigorously propagating true Hinduism through Vedānta, and removing all the misconceptions about it, deliberately spread by the mischievous and begoted propaganda of the Christian missionaries.

India however, needed an entirely different approach and treatment.

So, he now started on another lecture expedition—which he had already begun at Colombo itself—singularly aimed at rousing the Indian nation by demolishing its superstitions,—the accretions over several centuries—total lack of self-confidence and the mania of blindly imitating the West. He reminded his audiences of their past glory and greatness, castigated them for their ‘kitchen and the cooking-pot religion’ of exclusivity, their oppression of the

lower castes and groups as also keeping their women in ignorance by denying them education.

These lectures, now famous as the *Lectures from Colombo to Almora* are the modern Veda he has bequeathed to Modern India.

The result was a galvanisation of the Indian morale and a great phillip to the movement for political freedom, whose leaders derived great inspiration from him.





(Probably) Jaipur, 1891



San Francisco, 1900

Mission Accomplished

For several years, Vivekānanda had been cherishing a great desire in his heart, an intense yearning, to establish the urn containing the relics of his great Master and mentor, in a permanent place and build a monastery round it. This monastery, wherein will live his disciples and their disciples, thus forming a new monastic tradition and Order, will give a practical shape to his command to rejuvenate Hinduism as also rebuild the motherland.

When he sent Svāmī Rāmakṛṣṇānanda (A. D. 1863-1911) to Madras, to start a Math there to continue his work, he had already made a beginning in this direction.

On the 1st May 1897, he called a meeting of all the monastic and lay disciples of the great Master Rāmakṛṣṇa in the house of Balarām Bose (A. D. 1842-1890) and formed the organisation 'Ramakrishna Mission Association'.

Later, he purchased a plot of land on the

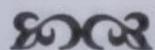
western bank of the river Gaṅgā and built a monastery with a shrine there.

He himself carried the urn containing the relics of Rāmakṛṣṇa, established it there and performed the consecration ceremony with all the attendant rituals. This was on the 9th December 1898.

This Math has now become well-known as the Belur Math and houses the Head-Quarters of the Ramakrishna Order.

Having thus accomplished a great mission he had cherished for long, he could now rest in peace.

Meanwhile, a good number of young men had joined the monastic order established by him. His own brother disciples—the monastic disciples of Rāmakṛṣṇa—too were living there. Hence Vivekānanda turned his attention now to the training of these young novices, with their help.



Pilgrimages and Tours

Vivekānanda found some time to go on a few pilgrimages, the notable places being Amarnāth and Kṣīrbhavānī, both in Kashmir.

In both the places he observed all the ceremonials and rituals prescribed for ordinary pilgrims as if to set an example to them.

He seems to have had some profound spiritual experiences during these pilgrimages.

He now decided to go to the West a second time, just to see how the work there was progressing. Accompanied by Svāmī Turīyānanda (A. D. 1863-1922) and Sister Niveditā, he first visited England for two weeks (in July 1899) and later went to America in August. He was happy to see how Svāmī Abhedānanda had established the Vedānta work on a firm foundation. He left Svāmī Turīyānanda on the west-coast at San Antone Valley, to establish a Retreat Centre (now known as the Śānti Āśrama). After attending

the Parliament of History of Religions in Paris and spending about three months there he returned to Calcutta on the 9th December 1900.



The Ascent

Rāmakṛṣṇa had predicted two things about his 'Naren' (Vivekānanda): That he would not reach his 40th year of his life; and that, the moment he discovered who he was, he would voluntarily cast off the physical body.

A few days before his passing away, he confided to one of his brother-disciples, in answer to a question inadvertently put to him, that he *now* knew who he was.

Three days before his final departure from this world, he instructed Svāmī Premānanda where to cremate his body!

He had even fixed the date as it were, after scrutinising the Bengālī almanac, a week earlier.

On the last day of his life—the 4th of July 1902—he rose from his bed very early, meditated in the shrine room (after closing all the doors and the windows) for an unusually long time, took a class on Sanskrit grammar for

the brahmacārins (tyros under training) for three hours, had a long stroll in the evening and then retired to his room at the time of vesper service in the shrine.

After meditating for sometime he lay down on the bed, spread on the floor and quietly breathed his last at 9 P.M.

It was noticed that the eyes were bloodshot and a little blood had oozed through the nostrils and the mouth, indicating the departure of life through the brahmarandhra (the aperture in the crown of the head).

The body was cremated at the very spot he had indicated. A magnificent memorial temple stands on that spot now, beckoning all to come to him and be inspired.



Character and Personality

A sound mind in a sound body, fully reflecting a spirit that is *always* sound—this is how Vivekānanda's person and personality can be described.

Physically, he was well-built and handsome. Gymnastics, games, swimming and wrestling were his favourite pastimes.

Intellectually, he was a giant. Photographic memory and a razor-sharp intellect helped him to master any subject in no time. By just glancing through a book he could not only reveal its contents but also often quote it verbatim.

Oratory was his special and most natural gift. When he spoke, tremendous power would appear to be emanating from him, transporting his audience to a plane where they would be listening to a voice from the void as it were.

He was an expert musician too. Endowed with a rich and melodious voice, cultured by

years of training in classical music, his singing, especially of devotional songs and hymns, could enthrall even the most prosaic hearts. He was also good at playing many a musical instrument.

Though most of his literary works are records of his inspiring—and extempore—talks, he has left us a few written compositions in Sanskrit, Bengālī and English, like hymns, poems and thoughtful essays. It is now acknowledged that he was a pioneer in the creation of a new style of Bengālī prose.

His great poem—*The Song of the Saṁnyāsin*—reverberating with the fiery feeling of a monk's inner stuff and psyche, is a masterpiece of English literature soaked in the Eastern spirit.

His power of meditation was astounding.* Rāmakṛṣṇa had declared that he was a dhyānasiddha, a sage perfected in meditation and had descended to the earth from the region

* Even from the childhood days, he could sit still in meditation like a statue, for a long time.

of the Saptarṣis, the Seven Sages of Hindu mythology.

In spite of the majestic external appearance, striking awe in the minds of the onlookers, he possessed a heart that was simple like that of a child and yet infinitely tender towards the sufferings of others.

In short, he personified in himself the perfect man—with Śāṅkara's intellect and the Buddha's heart—that he wanted everyone to become, in life.



The Philosophy of Vivekānanda

Vivekānanda has given his philosophy of life succinctly in two places. At the beginning of his remarkable treatise *Rājayoga* he has given the following aphoristic maxims which can be called the *Catussūtrī* (*Four Aphorisms*) of Neo-vedānta:

- (a) Each soul is potentially Divine.
- (b) The goal is to manifest this Divine within by controlling Nature, external and internal.
- (c) Do this either by work, or worship, or psychic control, or by philosophy, by one, or more, or all of these—and be free!
- (d) This is the whole of religion. Doctrines or dogmas, or rituals, or books, or temples, or forms, are but secondary details.

In addition, he has also given the motto of the Ramakrishna Order as:

‘ātmano mokṣārthaṁ jagaddhitāya ca,’

‘One should work for the liberation of oneself as also for the good of the world’.

These two together can be considered as the Philosophy of Vivekānanda. They are potentially capable of being expanded into full-fledged theories or even theses.



His Special Contribution

The special contribution of Vivekānanda to the world in general and to India in particular may be listed as follows:

- (i) By creating the Ramakrishna Math and the Ramakrishna Mission, he not only rejuvenated but also recast Hindu monasticism into a new mould, more relevant to the times.
- (ii) He laid the foundation and gave the right direction to the Indian independence movement, most of whose leaders were inspired by his speeches and writings.
- (iii) He restored the national self-respect of the Indians by re-educating them in their past glory, advised them against blindly imitating the West, but also exhorted them to learn the best from it, in which we have been deficient.

- (iv) He castigated the classes for their neglect, or even oppression, of the masses and inspired them to work for the latter's upliftment.
- (v) He effectively pointed out that religion—in the sense of spiritual evolution—is the soul of India and that all developments or reformations should be done only through that.
- (vi) He laid great stress on material development of the country also, since religion is not to be imposed upon empty stomachs. It was his humanism and not materialism that made him advocate this. He always felt that poverty and ignorance were dampers to spiritual progress and not its necessary conditions!
- (vii) He disentangled Vedānta from its traditional Hindu setting and the stranglehold of the pundits, and, taught it as a universal religion applicable to the whole of mankind.

In this sense he was a true teacher of the whole world.

(viii) Though he has generally followed Śaṅkara's Advaita, in his discourses on Hinduism and Vedānta he has made some original contributions too. The following points may specially be noted:

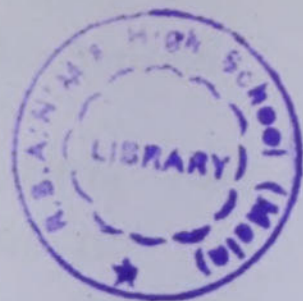
- (a) The Vedas are not particular books but represent the eternal laws of the spiritual world, even as science represents the scientific laws of the material world.
- (b) The three systems of Vedānta—Advaita, Viśiṣṭādvaita and Dvaita—are not mutually conflicting. They give out the same Truth from different (and complementary) standpoints like the photographs of the same sun taken from different distances and angles.
- (c) The Supreme Being is Personal-Impersonal. The latter is not a negation but a fulfilment of the former.

- (d) Anthropomorphism cannot be avoided in any human conception of God.
- (e) He considers māyā as not a theory, but a statement of fact. What is important is to transcend it and realise that which is beyond it.

Thus he has made Vedānta practical, by stressing the sādhanā aspects like non-attachment and yearning for the truth.



349
CLASS
Date 23.1.81 20



Epilogue

Perhaps, it is best to conclude this short essay with the well-known saying of another famous modern Indian leader who had the good fortune as a young man, of pulling the carriage in which Vivekānanda had been seated when he was received at Madras:

‘Swami Vivekananda saved Hinduism and saved India. But for him, we would have lost our religion and would not have gained our freedom. We therefore owe everything to Swami Vivekananda.’

—C. Rajagopalachari (A. D. 1878-1972).



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This is the great fact:

*Strength is life; weakness is death.
Strength is felicity, life eternal,
immortal; weakness is constant
strain and misery, weakness is
death!*

—Svāmī Vivekānanda



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