

Overcoming All Odds, Vivekananda Succeeds

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Swami Vivekananda (1863 to 1902), the 'Hindu Napoleon', was a comprehensive personality and a versatile genius. He is The One person who stands as a golden link between India and the Western world for centuries together. We had put up a wall of custom around ourselves, never allowing ideas to come in or go out of our country. We were like the frog of the well that turned out the frog of the sea, saying that nothing could be bigger than his well and termed the frog of the sea a big liar. Vivekananda took India out of this isolation and brought her into the mainstream of international life. He made us realize that this long stagnation of our national life was responsible for most of our evils. We should clearly bear in mind that India's own activity in the field of dissemination of ideas was confined to the Eastern half of the world. It was the Western mind that came and took whatever it could get from the Indian tradition. Tagore said of Vivekananda, "If you want to understand India, study Vivekananda, in him, everything is positive, nothing negative". During his wanderings in western India, Vivekananda heard of a World Parliament of Religions being organized in Chicago in 1893 to mark the fourth centenary of the discovery of America by Columbus in 1493.

A group of young energetic students at Madras University encouraged Swamiji to represent Hinduism at the proposed world parliament of religions and as destiny would have it, Vivekananda set sail for the US from Bombay on 31st May 1893. Who else could be better fitted for this task than this disciple of Swami Ramakrishna Paramhans who was in himself a parliament of religions in a true sense? Vivekanand's great mind saw a connection where others saw only isolated facts. What better equipment could one have that was to represent before the parliament of religions India in its entirety - Vedic and Vedantic, Buddhist and Jain, Shaivik and Vaishnavi and even Mohammedan?

The youth of today is caught in a dilemma. Various reasons and circumstances are responsible for it, but they should take inspiration from Vivekananda who emphasized on Karma Yoga, the attainment of God through work. Karma Yoga teaches us how to work for work's sake 'unattached' without caring who is helped and what for. The karmyogi works because it is his nature, because he feels that it is good for him to do so and he has no object beyond that.

When we speak of Vivekananda going to America we will have to remember two things

1. He was not being sent abroad by a free political Indian state.
2. He was not being sent abroad by a central Indian religious authority or church for the Indian spiritual tradition did not permit the development of an all-powerful Church or an authoritarian central creed.

This was to cause serious difficulties for Vivekananda to gain admission as a delegate to the Chicago parliament of religion. And which he was to overcome by the compelling force of his personality. From the time he left and up to his first speech in Chicago he had to face many hardships and sharp moments

of despair. Referring to the initial difficulties with this emissary of India had to face, The 'Life of Swami Vivekananda by his Eastern Disciples' (p. 292) says "burdened with unaccustomed possessions, not knowing where to go conspicuous because of his strange attire, annoyed by the lads who ran after him in amusement, weary and confused by the exorbitant charges of the potters, bewildered by the crowds- chiefly with visitors to and from the world's fair, he sought a hotel. When the potters had brought his luggage and he was at last alone and free from interruptions, he sat down amidst his trunks and satchels and tried to calm his mind." A lean purse and absence of a letter of a letter of credit from India posed further problems. But in spite of all these trials and hardships, he was determined not to give up but to make every attempt to succeed in America. This fighting spirit is what the youth of today should imbibe from the life of Swami Vivekananda. Despite hardships Vivekananda managed to make his mark. The trend of today is that a little problem makes the youth Go dilly dallying, they lack confidence and patience instead of trying to overcome problems they start blaming parents seniors stars family circumstances society and so on. Mark, how Vivekananda struggled and rose to succeed.

But God helps those who have firm determination. He met Professor Wright who proved to be an angel in the garb of human being. When the Swami told him he carried no credentials required to be a delegate, Professor Wright made a famous remark, "To ask you, Swami, for your credentials is like asking the sun to state its right to shine". Such was the greatness of his personality. Mr. Wright wrote a letter of introduction stating "here is a man who is more learned than all our learned professors put together". It undoubtedly was a literal manifestation of Divine Grace.

Hardships were still not over. Swami Vivekananda lost the letter of introduction given by Mr. Wright. Now, it was the turn of Mrs. Hale, before whose house he sat begging, to come to his rescue. Somehow he reached the office of the World Parliament. Delegates representing diverse forms of organized religious beliefs came from different parts of the world. It helped to unify the religious vision of humanity, to broaden the outlook of religions and to initiate an era of dialogue among them which had largely not functioned till now. On the opening day the chairman had called Swami Vivekananda several times to speak but he had said, "No, not now". Until the chairman was puzzled and wondered if he would speak at all. Later in the afternoon the Swami rose and surveyed in a sweep the large assembly before him. The whole audience grew intent; there was pin drop silence. Bowing to Devi Saraswati, he addressed his audience as, "Sisters and brothers of America". Before he could utter another word, the whole Parliament was caught in a wave of enthusiasm and hundreds rose to their feet with shouts of applause.

Swami was bewildered. When silence was restored, he thanked the youngest of nations, America in the name of the most ancient order of monks in the world namely the Vedic order of Sanyasis. He read his celebrated paper on Hinduism on 19th September. His paper on 'Hinduism' is the outstanding definition of the complex Hindu religion in all its comprehensiveness and versatility. Before analyzing his speech we will study what Vivekanand meant by religion and secondly what the world understood of Hinduism. Vivekananda defined religion as the vital and moral force which gives strength to a person or to a nation. In thundering words he said, "Strength is life weakness is death". He wanted to strike a harmonious balance between Kshatriya manhood and Brahmanic intellectualism. The world knows him as a gigantic mind that employed his stupendous will power and energy to bring about a regeneration of India. The intense nationalism and patriotism of Vivekananda is revealed in this declaration quoted from "The Future of India".

“For the next 50 years... let all other vain Gods disappear from our mind. This is the only God that is awake our own race. Everywhere His hands, everywhere His feet, everywhere His ears. He covers everything. All other Gods are sleeping. What vain Gods shall we go after and yet cannot worship the God that we see all around us, the VIRAT?... The first of all worships is the worship of the Virat - of these all around us... these are all our Gods - men and animals, and the first Gods we have to worship are our own countrymen”.

Hinduism had been the subject of intense misrepresentation at the hands of Christian missionaries who suffered from ‘imperialism complex’ and were actuated with a sense of burden to ‘civilize’ the black men and brown men by clearing the road for the economic exploitation of Asia and Africa. Vivekananda had a different approach. His concept of Hinduism was more comprehensive which could shelter within its bosom the profound philosophic intellect by its Nyaya Sankhya and Vedanta. It could offer to the psychologist its vast store of psychic wisdom of the Raj Yoga, could inspire the devotee with the enchanted hymns of the Sam Veda and the devotional songs of Tulsidas and finally could give to a hectic worker the doctrine of Karma of Shri Krishna.

The West considered Hinduism a cluster of obscure cults and ritualistic superstitions, a land of serpents, orthodox dogmas and primitive ceremonialism which was out rightly rejected by Swami Vivekananda. Instead it signified to him a body of moral and spiritual injunctions and super temporal laws for the upliftment of humanity. Vivekananda introduced Hinduism as the ‘Mother of all Religions’. The ancient Vedic religion influenced Buddhism, the religion of Persia, Judea, which in turn lead to the rise of Christianity.

He was a representative of entire Hinduism from the Vedas to Vaishnavism, instead of emphasising the Samhitas of the Veda he supported the Gnana Kand of the Upanishads. Vivekananda believed that man does not travel from error to truth but climbs up from lower truth to higher truth. To him, all that is true is Veda. “By the Vedas, no books are meant. They mean the accumulated treasury of spiritual laws discovered by different persons in different times. He believed that the distinctive doctrine of Hinduism is that of ‘Ista Devatha’ which means that every soul has the right to choose its own path and to seek God in its own way.” Vivekananda proposed the idea of a Universal religion without temporal and spatial or sectarian bounds and declared “Offer such a religion and all the nations will follow you”. Swamiji stood for the unity of East and West. In his address at the final session the Swami Rose to luminous heights and highlighted the achievements of the parliament of religions in the following optimistic words.

“If the Parliament of Religions has shown anything to the world it is this: It has proved to the world that Holiness, Purity and Charity are not the exclusive possessions of any church in the world and that every system has produced men and women of the most exalted character. In the face of this evidence if anybody dreams of the exclusive survival of his own religion and the destruction of the others I pity him from the bottom of my heart.” Vivekananda stood for the unity of East and West. The most remarkable thing which distinguished him from the rest of the emissaries was that while the others professed their own religion, Vivekananda stood for harmony of all religions. He brought out the tune of unity and harmony, of love and peace, the tune of the divine in the heart of man.

It was a brief but intense speech. Its spirit of universality, earnestness and breadth of outlook completely captivated the whole assembly. He cast off the formalism of the Parliament and spoke to the people in the language of the heart. Each orator had spoken of his God of the God of his sect. He alone spoke on behalf of all their Gods and embraced them placed them all in the Universal Being. His powerful and eloquent orations on the stage of World Parliament of Religions in Chicago in September 1893 gave to our motherland a new self-confidence, which is the true psychological precursor of an independent foreign policy. Sister Nivedita describes the central import of his address in the following words “Of the Swami’s address before the Parliament of Religions, it may be said that when he began to speak it was the religious ideas of the Hindus but when he ended Hinduism had been created...”

In my article, I have tried to focus on the things that the youth of India can learn from Swami Vivekananda. They are the most confused and misled lot. They get baffled and irritated the moment a tricky situation crops up, whether it is related to studies or career building or relation building, they often find themselves in a fishy situation. There are two things which I believe confuses them the most. One is the eagerness to succeed without any speed breakers and the other is the real meaning of religion. No doubt, their family, peer group, friends, teachers and the school can play a huge role in motivating and directing young boys and girls on the right path but the lessons which they can learn from the life of Swami Vivekananda is incomparable. Each and every idea, belief, concept and style of Swami Vivekananda is in itself a lesson from which we can learn something.

The youth today, disenchanted by most things Indian, are leaving their homes and families to seek shelter abroad. Brain Drain from India has occurred at an alarming rate. Children go looking for greener pastures abroad and prefer to settle abroad too. The most common route taken by the youth of India is to complete Bachelors from India in any Science, Technology, Engineering or Mathematical subject from any of the IITs, then finish their masters from any college abroad. This gives them the golden opportunity to join the Big Tech Companies at Silicon Valley. Notable businessmen such as Satya Nadella and Sunder Pichai took this route. Chinese students too, prefer to study abroad. However, after completing their studies, they wish to return to their own country and start a business there. The impregnable and utter love that Swami Vivekananda had for his motherland enabled him to bear all hardships and speak of India as one country. The youth would do well to imbibe his patriotism.

“Karmanye Vadhikarasye Ma Phaleshu Kadachana”, the famous tenet of Gita was deeply ingrained in Swami Vivekananda. To do one’s duty without expecting any material or immaterial benefits in return. This lets man stay above the happiness and sadness of the material world. His book ‘Meditation and its Methods’ is a masterpiece and a brilliant work for those seeking solace in materialistic things and who for those who are neck deep into the never ending desires. It is an answer to all problems physical, mental, emotional, spiritual and the like.

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