

Bengali Association of Greater Chicago celebrates

The 150th Birth Anniversary of Swami Vivekananda

September 14-15, 2013





A Blessing

The Mother's heart, the hero's will,
The softest flowers' sweetest feel;
The charm and force that ever sway
The altar-fire's flaming play;
The strength that leads, in love obeys;
Far-reaching dreams, and patient ways,
Eternal faith in Self, in all,
The light Divine in great, in small;
All these and more than I could see,
Today may 'Mother' grant to thee!

— Swami Vivekananda

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Published by



Bengali Association of Greater Chicago

We are grateful to all the writers who have submitted articles for this commemorative magazine. The content, opinions and ideas expressed in the articles belong to the writers and are not necessarily those of the editors or the BAGC committee.

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Sri Sarada Devi (1853-1920)



Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902)

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Sri Ramakrishna Sharanam

BLESSINGS

August 04, 2013

I am glad to know that the Bengali Association of Greater Chicago will be organizing a two day celebration on September 14th and 15th honoring Swami Vivekananda and celebrating his 150th Birth Anniversary. Also it pleases me to know that a Magazine would be published to commemorate this occasion.

The Parliament of Religions which was held in Chicago in 1893 was a turning point in the history of India and of the world. Swami Vivekananda went to the West as a messenger of his master Sri Ramakrishna and his universal message was nothing but the eternal truths of Vedanta. To the Westners who had heard only sin and sinners he preached the divinity of man. The need of the age is coalition of the Eastern spirituality and the Western science and technology. More than a hundred years back, Swami Vivekananda seeded this great vision and also expounded his Master's great message - harmony of religions.

My earnest prayer to Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi and Swami Vivekananda to shower their choicest blessings on all of you for the successful completion of the Celebrations and hope the Magazine will help to disseminate the universal and eternal message of the Holy Trio in Greater Chicago.

(Swami Atmasthananda)

President

Ramakrishna Math & Ramakrishna Mission

Bitosh Sinha

President

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05 July 2013

Dear Sri Bitosh Sinha,

I am glad to know that Bengali Association of Greater Chicago is going to celebrate the 150th Birth Anniversary of Swami Vivekananda by organizing a two-day programme on 14 and 15 September 2013, and that a commemorative volume will be released on that occasion.

Swami Vivekananda gave a new definition of morality when he said, "That which is selfish is immoral, and that which is unselfish is moral." The best way to free ourselves from the demon of selfishness clinging to us is by constantly doing good to others. This is the only way to attain happiness. All our pleasure-seeking endeavours that are rooted in selfishness lead us, on the other hand, only to greater and greater sorrow and disharmony.

One of the best forms of service is to place before our fellow beings noble thoughts and ideals. I pray to Swami Vivekananda that the events you are going to celebrate and the souvenir you are going to publish, be successful in spreading the Swamiji's life-giving message among the people of Chicago and even beyond.

With best wishes,

Yours sincerely,

(Swami Suhitananda)
General Secretary

Sri Bitosh Sinha
President,
Bengali Association of Greater Chicago



President's Letter

More than one hundred years ago a young monk from India visited the United States. His address at the Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1893 mesmerized his audience. His message of religious tolerance, peace and love for all human beings regardless of religious beliefs or color still rings true. This great son of India and Bengal was Swami Vivekananda.

The Bengali Association of Greater Chicago proudly celebrates the 150th Birth Anniversary of Swami Vivekananda. We are honored to be part of the great city which first gave him the opportunity to speak and heard his message of love and peace one hundred and twenty years ago.

Swamiji firmly believed regardless of the religion you followed the ultimate road led to God. At the Parliament of Religions he courageously stood before an audience unfamiliar with India and with the Gita and quoted from it "Whatsoever comes to Me, through whatsoever form, I reach him; all men are struggling through paths which in the end lead to me."

In honor of Swamiji's 150th Birth Anniversary Celebrations on September 14th and 15th, 2013, the Bengali Association of Greater Chicago is publishing this commemorative magazine. The articles showcase Swamiji's vision, his philosophy and spirituality.

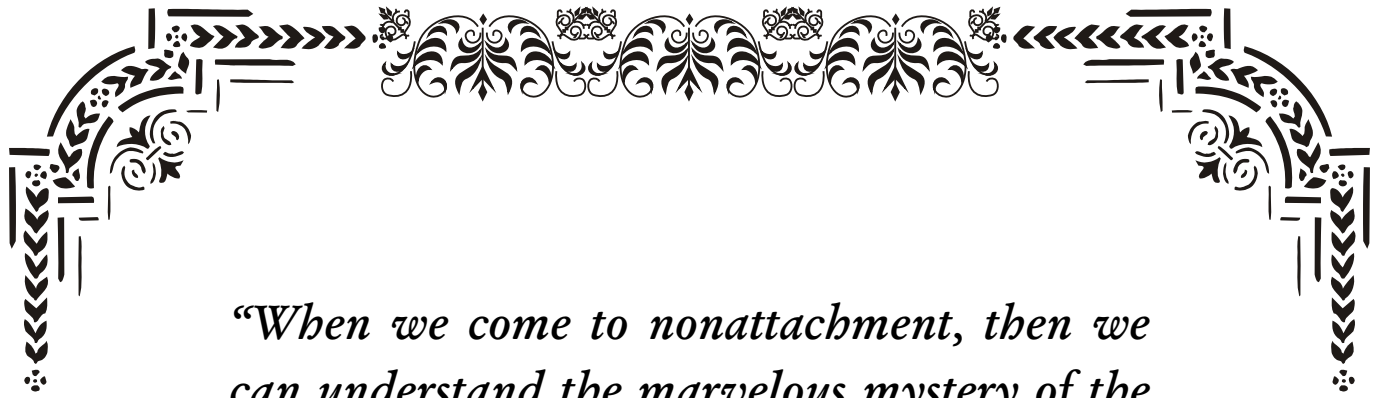
It is our privilege to celebrate Swami Vivekananda's vision and message in Chicago, the great city where Swamiji first brought Hinduism to the world stage. We hope everyone who attends the event and who read this magazine will be inspired by Swamiji's message of universal love for all living beings. The path he showed us from this quote at the Parliament of Religions is one which encompasses all thoughts and religions.

"As the different streams having their sources in different places all mingle their water in the sea, so, O Lord, the different paths which men take through different tendencies, various though they appear, crooked or straight, all lead to Thee." — Bhagvad Gita

Bitosh Sinha
2013 President
Bengali Association of Greater Chicago

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“When we come to nonattachment, then we can understand the marvelous mystery of the universe: how it is intense activity and at the same time intense peace, how it is work every moment and rest every moment.”

With Best Wishes from

**Adrija and Amitava Das
And
Family**



To Be a Leader

Swami Ishatmananda

Minister-in-Charge, Vivekananda Vedanta Society of Chicago

It is a very difficult task to take on the role of a leader. One must be a servant of servants and must accommodate a thousand of minds. There must not be a shade of jealousy or selfishness, then you are a leader.

— Swami Vivekananda

“Leader”, the word is known to all but unfortunately the importance and the significance of leadership is not clear to the majority of the people. Survival, growth and progress in every human society depend mainly on the leader. If the leader is weak, indecisive, short-sighted, the group he is leading is bound to be destroyed. If the leader is courageous, intelligent, perfect in taking decisions, the people under him will surely succeed in all respects.

The moment we utter the word “leader”, immediately an image of a king or a statesman, politician, or military general flashes in our mind. But, human life in all stages is guided, motivated and governed by different leaders. The life of an individual begins in a family and there the head of the family is a leader. If he or she lacks leadership, all the members of the family suffer. The decision of the head of the family is the destination for the members of that family. If a head decides that no education is necessary for the younger members of the family, then the destination of those young members is nothing but to lead illiterate lives. Similarly, student life begins to grow in an educational institution, and the principal of that institute is the leader there. If the principal is bereft of leadership qualities, the growth of the young learners become stagnated.

A head of a family, a principal of an institution, a village chief and even some people whom we usually do not consider as leaders, are real leaders. If they fail to perform as true leaders, knowingly or unknowingly, they cause a tremendous loss of human resources.

Decision of the head of the family is the destination for the members of that family.

LEADER - WHO & WHY

According to the Work and its effect, leaders may be categorized as follows :

1. Temporary Leader
2. Semi-permanent Leader
3. Permanent Leader
4. Eternal Leader

1. Temporary Leader — Those who influence and guide a small group of people in a particular situation for a limited period of time are called temporary leaders.

In the wake of an accident or natural calamity like a flood, earthquake, etc. there maybe an individual who comes up to meet the challenge of that particular occasion and leads the people. He or she may or may not have the qualities which are required for other types of leaders, but they are generally obeyed by the people and usually the effect is also good.

2. Semi-permanent Leader — Those who guide and govern a group of people for a period of time and influence them for good or bad and, thereby, make a mark on the society are called Semi-permanent Leaders.

The Head of the family, the head of an institution, an Abbot or a Mohanta of a monastery, a village chief, military commanders, MLAs, Chief Ministers of states and even Prime Ministers, Kings of small kingdoms, C. E. O's of business houses etc. - are the examples of Semi-permanent Leaders.

Semi-permanent Leaders need to have leadership qualities or else their wrong decisions, mistakes and

follies may make a group or an individual suffer. These semi-permanent leaders may make or mar the human society, although in a small way.

Media as leader

In the present day society, very powerful semi-permanent leaders have emerged, who can influence millions in a flash. They are known as Media. All of us are aware of the tremendous effect of media, TV, and movies.

In a remote part of India where T.V. is almost the only source of information from the world, a group of young students badly insulted and heckled their principal for some small reason like arrangement everything for a picnic. Angered by his reply, the students slapped the gentleman before others. Insulted, the principal wanted to commit suicide. Somehow the timely intervention of local people and police saved his life.

When the students were asked why they had done such a thing, the reply was, “why, the students in Bombay also do like this!”

Bombay students? How do you know?

We have seen it in such and such movie.

A day or two before this incident, I saw an interview with a so called famous gentleman, who was sometime mentioned by media as 'Cultural Ambassador of India,' 'cultural leader' etc. He was vehemently advocating freedom of cinema and that there should not be any Censor Board for cinema etc. 'Let people select what they like to see' as far as I can remember, this was his statement ! Freedom is good but are they, the people, to whom freedom of choice, is given, capable? Media, cinema, movie the present day semi-permanent leaders, must be careful about what they produce, and present to the masses particularly in a diverse society like India.

3. Permanent Leaders — Those who lead a whole race or nation, their influence and teachings are followed from generation after generation in that race or nation and also sometimes inspire other nations. They create history and remain enshrined in history.

Kings like Ashoka and Akbar; Military Generals like Napoleon; Political reformers like Lenin;

Statesmen like Abraham Lincoln; Political leaders like Mahatma Gandhi etc. are all examples of the permanent leader.

These permanent leaders possess tremendous personality and charisma and, thereby, influence their followers. In times of trials and tribulation, the followers do not doubt their leader or question his authority. Obviously, the qualities of perfect leadership are not only essential but are a must for these permanent leaders.

Many thinkers of present day India lament the partition of India, the never-ending problem of Kashmir, the creation of states on the basis of language, the different laws for different communities in one country, the education policies, the freedom for any incapable Indian to be elected as 'Law Maker of India' etc. The fact is, the decisions of the leaders, past or present, go on affecting the nation. Though the decisions were taken long back, generations are affected.

Hitler chose war and not only the German nation but also the whole world suffered and is still suffering.

Therefore, in a democratic country like India, permanent leaders should be very carefully chosen and accepted.

4. Eternal Leaders — These leaders are enlightened souls, great philosophers, seers. They inspire not only a race or a nation but the whole of humanity. Their leadership transcends all cast, creed, linguistic or cultural barriers and does not remain within any geographical boundary, because they govern through unselfish love. Though they are born in different places at different times, wear different dresses, and speak in different languages their ideals are one. Be good yourself and Do good to others.

The problem is not with the “Lights of Humanity” but with their followers. Most of the time the broad universal teachings of these Great Masters are misunderstood and misinterpreted by their over-enthusiastic followers. Ironically, their Message of Love is spread through hatred and violence!

Since the whole of humanity is affected by the interpretation of the Great Souls by their apostles, messengers, flag bearers, and disciples, they must have

all the qualities of a leader or else they, the exponents, the so called torch bearers of a particular faith, may transform nectar into poison.

How a Ruler should be?

Interestingly, the ancient Indian thinkers gave lot of importance to leadership. A bad leader means not a single bad man but bad fate for many. Vidura, the step-brother and learned minister of King Dhritarashtra listed the most important qualities of a leader and also spoke at a great length on leadership and administration. Vidura's utterances are known as "Vidura Niti". The Vidura Niti is a small section of eight chapters (chapters 33 to 40) of the "Udyoga Parva" from the great Indian epic Mahabharata.

Vidura prescribed the following qualities for a ruler to be a perfect leader

- | | |
|-------------------|------------------------|
| a. Simplicity | b. Purity |
| c. Contentment | d. Truthfulness |
| e. Self-restraint | f. Patience |
| g. Honesty | h. Charity |
| i. Steadiness | j. Humility |
| k. Faith | l. Exertion |
| m. Forbearance | n. Sweetness in speech |
| o. Good Company | |

Vidura explains the philosophy of ruling a kingdom by describing king's basic.

A King should Do

1. "The King should wish for the prosperity of all and should never set his heart on the misery of his subjects" (36)
2. "The King should look after people who have fallen into adversity and who are in distress" (33)
3. "The King should show kindness to all creatures" (35)
4. "The King should never impede the growth and development of the agriculture and economic activity in his kingdom" (36)
5. "The King should always do that which is for the good of all creatures" (37)

6. "The King should always be ready to protect those dependent on him" (40)

7. "The virtuous King is never indifferent to even the minutest suffering of his subjects" (39)

8. "The virtuous King enlists the confidence of his devoted subordinates by zealously looking after their welfare." (37)

9. "The King who renounces lust and anger, who bestows wealth upon proper recipients, who is discriminative, learned and active is regarded as an authority by all men."

10. "The King who desires the highest success in all matters connected with worldly profit should, from the very beginning, practice virtue. Prosperity takes its birth in good deeds" (36)

A King should not do

1. "The friendship of the sinful has to be avoided". (34)
2. "Misuse of wealth, harshness of speech and extreme severity of punishment will ruin even firmly established monarchs". (33)
3. "Evil minded Kings, due to lack of sense-control, are destroyed by lust to expand their territory". (34)
4. "The King's prosperity, built on crookedness alone, is destined to be destroyed". (36)
5. "The King should never make a person his minister without examining him well. During examination, the King should reject those who are ungrateful, shameless, who have wicked dispositions and who don't give others their due". (38)

Another famous thinker on Leadership and the state in ancient India is Kautilya. Kautilya emphasizes that the foundation of an organization is its financial strength, its economy. No good organization or country can run effectively without having its economy in good condition.

According to Kautilya, the objective of any king (leader) is to create, expand, protect and enjoy wealth. A Leader should know that spending wealth in the proper manner is as important as earning it.

A Leader should know that spending wealth in the proper manner is as important as earning it.

In his famous book, Kautilya Arthashastra, he asked the King (leader), "Be ever active in management of the economy, because the root of wealth is economic activity; inactivity brings material distress. Without any active policy, both current prosperity and future gains are destroyed. (1.19.35/36)

According to Kautilya a good leader should know how to handle masses of people with different temperaments, attitudes, thinking capacity. Understanding people is the most important quality of a leader.

Kautilya felt that a king or a leader should know the secret of administration which according to him are :

1. Saama - Counseling 2. Daana - Offering gifts
3. Danda - Punishment 4. Bheda - Separation

In researching the "Sundarakanda" of the Ramayana, Sri K.V. Rao found that all the best qualities of a leader were present in Mahavir Hanuman and those qualities are :

- | | |
|-----------------------|------------------------|
| 1. Motivation | 2. Communication |
| 3. Determination | 4. Sharp intellect |
| 5. Excellence of work | 6. Courage |
| 7. Commitment | 8. Mind control |
| 9. Self-confidence | 10. Integrity or Trust |

That great thinker of Modern India, Swami Vivekananda, is very specific about the qualities of a leader. According to him the post or position of a leader is not for enjoyment but sacrifice.

"A captain must sacrifice his head," they say. If you can lay down your life for a cause, then only you can be a leader.... It is hard work to be a leader one must crush all one's own self under the feet of the community..."

There are two main methods for Administration:

1. By fear and force 2. By love and loyalty

Usually most of the leaders, history proves it, prefer to rule by the first method of Administration, i.e., by fear and force.

But Swami Vivekananda advocates the second method of administration, i.e., by love and loyalty. In his opinion, the best leader, however, is one who "leads like the baby. The baby, though apparently depending on everyone, is the king of the household. At least, to my thinking that is the secret (to be the best leader)" (CW.SV. VIII-428)

The administrator who wants to rule through love and loyalty needs a perfect character. He must be impersonal, equal to all, and most importantly unselfish. He should draw love and respect equally from his followers. According to Swamiji, "there is no allegiance possible where there is no character in the leader, and perfect purity ensures the most lasting allegiance and confidence." (CW. SV. VI-135)

In a letter to Sister Nivedita, Swamiji's dear Margo, he clearly mentioned the secret of a successful leader. "I see persons giving me almost the whole of their love. But I must not give anyone the whole of mine in return, for that day the work would be ruined. Yet there are some who will look for such a return, not having the breadth of the impersonal view. It is absolutely necessary to the work that I should have the enthusiastic love of as many as possible, while I myself remain entirely impersonal. Otherwise, jealousy and quarrels would break up everything. A leader must be impersonal. I am sure you understand this. I do not mean that one should be a brute, making use of the devotion of others for his own ends, and laughing in his sleeve meanwhile. What I mean is what I am, intensely personal in my love, but having the power to pluck out my own heart with my own hand, if it becomes necessary, 'for the good of many, for the welfare of many', as Buddha said." (CW. SV. 429)

Why, we Indians, can not?

I was sitting in the office of a Secretary to the Government of India, a very senior IAS officer. There were a few other officers also in the rank of Asst. Secretaries, Directors etc. After the official work, tea was served to all and casual discussion on different topics began. Suddenly, one gentleman showed a newspaper and said, pointing the picture of a present day national leader, he has been judged first in a popularity assessment by securing 47% of the votes (of the readers of that particular newspaper). The senior

IAS officer looked at that and shrugged and snorted.

His body language proved his dislike. Then he looked at me and said, “Swamiji, why can't we Indians become good leaders and administrators? Though we have traveled a long way from 1947 and statistics show that great progress has been made within these few years, we have lost our values in all respects, why? What is your opinion about the degradation of leadership quality, the degradation of moral values, and how we can overcome these?”

This shrug, this snort, these questions can be seen, can be heard everywhere in India. This disrespect for almost all leaders by almost everyone is not at all healthy sign.

A leader must be: 1) impersonal, 2) Equal to all, 3) Unselfish, and 4) Pure in character.

— Swami Vivekananda

There was a time when the world was mad to discover India. Adventurous people sailed through rough, uncharted oceans to reach her shores. In prosperity, in wealth, in education, in spirituality, in every respect, India was the beacon light for all. Pre-independence Indian leaders and masses joined the Freedom Movement not for post or position but as a holy duty. They fought with the Britishers not with a selfish motive but to gain with the zeal of sacrifice. Why, then we do not find such people in a majority among our present day leaders? Sitting on the chairs of administration, why have the leaders changed?

Swami Vivekananda has given the answer to this question in a single word, 'Slave mentality.'

What is slave mentality? Swamiji writes. “I won't let anyone rise! That jealousy, that absence of conjoint action is the very nature of enslaved nations. If but one amongst them rises to greatness, all the others would at once set themselves against him and try to level him down.” We were devoid of the position of decision maker for nearly 700 to 800 years. For almost 8 to 10 generations we lived and worked under the ruling rod of monarchs. Whatever they said, we followed; whatever they asked us to do, we did, and generation after generation, century after century, we were not

allowed to think any original thought, we never did any work according to our free will. This long subjugation and dependence on the masters have developed a sense of slavery in our temperament and mentality. A slave under a tyrant master is humble and obedient, but when he, the slave, becomes the master, he exceeds his master in tyranny, mean-mindedness, jealousy, hatred, backbiting, short sightedness, inferiority complexes, and above all, selfishness. These are the signs of a slave.

When one with a slave mentality becomes a leader, it is obvious that he will not allow any one better than him in his administration. Due to his inferiority complex he'll always prefer his underling to be more unworthy than him. He will never allow anyone having personality, intelligence, self-respect and all good qualities of a leader to live and grow. Obviously, the administration fills with sycophants.

That is why Swami Vivekananda said “At any cost, any price, any sacrifice, we must never allow that (slave-mentality) to creep in among ourselves”.

Be Citizen and not Subject

When masses of a country behave like responsible citizens, good leaders grow in that society. If one goes through the history of India right from the Vedic age down to 19th century, barring a few exceptions, most of the places used to be ruled by different kings. Kings were the ultimate authority to make the supreme decisions and to execute them. The people were considered as “praja”, subjects; they didn't have any say in the rule. They only used to follow the rules and regulations laid down by the king and sometimes helped the king as volunteer soldiers. Thousands of years they lived like that and never developed the idea of patriotism. They could never think that the land they were living in was their own.

In some of the nations like Greece, Sparta, Rome, and many other European nations, the general masses had the opportunity to take part in forming the decision and, of course, help in executing the decision. They used to live in the city and developed the concept of the citizen. Citizens are always concerned about the place where they live and its society; hence,

A capable leader means a prosperous nation.

psychologically, they belong to the place and the society.

Students of the history of India know of the Battle of Plassey in 1757 AD. The British rulers declared a war against the king of Bengal, Nawab Siraj-ud-daullah, and travelled from Calcutta to Murshidabad, the then capital of Bengal, almost 150 km north of Calcutta. There were so many villages they marched through, but not a single villager resisted the British army. Why? Because of the “praja” mentality. To fight with the aggressors was the responsibility of the king and not of the subjects. The sense of belongingness regarding the country was totally absent.

Only after the call of Swami Vivekananda, at the

end of 19th century, did the whole undivided India shook off the slumber and started to feel that the country belonged to them.... Remember that you are dedicated from your birth at the altar of your motherland. All gods and goddesses are sleeping; the only goddess that is awake, waiting for your offering, is your motherland.

Even today, after the 66 years of political Independence, majority of the Indians are not aware of the responsibility to their motherland.

When the citizens of a free sovereign nation are aware of their responsibilities to their country and society, obviously, good leaders will grow in that society.

A leader must be impersonal.

I do not mean that one should be a brute, making use of the devotion of others for his own ends, and laughing in his sleeve meanwhile.

What I mean is what I am, intensely personal in my love, but having the power to pluck out my own heart with my own hand, if it becomes necessary, 'for the good of many, for the welfare of many', as Buddha said.

— Swami Vivekananda

Swami Vivekananda

Pravrajika Ajayaprana

“Now, you folks have been wanting me to show you a real renouncer such as I have been telling you about one who has renounced everything for the Truth. Very well, a great teacher has recently come from India. His name is Swami Vivekananda. I advise you all to go and hear him. He is one of the greatest teachers and greatest ascetics India has ever produced.”

This announcement was made by Mr. Paul Miltz, a German-Polish preacher in Oakland on a Sunday in 1900. The words were so convincing and sincere that the next Sunday, when the preacher came to the pulpit he found the hall empty save for two people, one Mr. Brown and a German lady. Everybody else had gone to see and hear the 'real renouncer.' The next Sunday Mr. Brown and the German lady also decided to hear the great teacher and ascetic from India. The indelible impression made by this astounding experience of meeting Swami Vivekananda may be better expressed in young Mr. Brown's own words, as given in his memoirs:

'He was not there when we arrived, so we took our seats and waited. Then someone in an orange-coloured robe walked from a little side-room out on the platform and I said to myself, "Who is that? An Emperor?" His walk was that of a god, a man accustomed to ruling. When he sat down the audience burst into tumultuous applause. But he sat there unmoved, his face reflecting the perfect calm within. Then he rose and just held up his hands with palms facing the audience and at once there was a silence that you could feel, it was so tense, so palpable. I said to my companion, "Who is this person who can make a large audience like this yield and in a moment give silence? He is obviously accustomed to commanding others." Then he began his lecture.

Mr. Brown and other members of Mr. Miltz's

Sunday audience had gone to see a 'real renouncer,' and what they found was 'an emperor accustomed to ruling,' for it was the great ascetic, 'Lord Maheshwara Himself in human garb, who stood before them.

Great and inspiring thoughts flowed from the monk effortlessly, and the large audience was electrified by his magnetic personality, his imposing appearance, his rhetoric, and the powerful thoughts born of strong conviction and intimate personal experience. The western world was amazed to see this man who represented India and her religion, and in whom was seen a beautiful, harmonious meeting-ground of all the great philosophies of the world. All the paths to liberation propounded by the great religious leaders or incarnations, all met in him.

Yes, one who renounces every earthly thing in order to gain divine glory and reach the realization of the Ultimate Truth finds, at the end of his quest, the whole of creation bowing at his feet. Truly has Thomas Carlyle said when depicting the causes and circumstances that led to the bloody days of the French Revolution, 'If my algebra does not deceive me, unity divided by nothingness gives infinity. If you give up even the one thing the world owes you, the whole world will lie at your feet.'

A Jnani and Bhakta

In the eyes of most men Sri Ramakrishna was all bhakti outside, but all jnana inside, whereas Swami Vivekananda was all jnana without but all bhakti within. Anyone will agree to this who has read that extraordinary book, the Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna, and the mighty treatises on Advaitic philosophy and other topics, skillfully dealt with in The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda. But Swamiji himself expresses his nature very vividly through some of his conversations and letters.² Sister Nivedita, in a letter to

¹A name for Lord Shiva. Swami Vivekananda's (Narendranath) Mother had prayed to Lord Shiva for a boy and she believed that her prayer was answered when "Narendranath" was born.

²Sister Nivedita (Margaret Noble) the Irish disciple of Swami Vivekananda who dedicated her life to serving India and the uplift of Indian women.

³Miss Josephine Macleod, quoted Swamiji telling Mrs. Sara Bull in the course of conversation.

'You see there is one thing called Love, and there is another thing called Union; and Union is greater than Love. I do not love religion. I have become identified with it. It is my life; so no man loves that thing in which his life has been spent, in which he really has accomplished something. That which we love is not yet oneself. Your husband did not love music for which he had always studied; he loved engineering, in which as yet he knew comparatively little. This is the difference between bhakti and jnana and this is why jnana is greater than bhakti.'

This is only one side of the picture. On another occasion, when speaking about the love of Radha, the queen of devotees, for her Lord Krishna, Swamiji remarked that someone's fingertips may be cut by the foam of freshly drawn cow's milk, but softer still was Sri Radha's heart, mellowed by her all-surrendering love for her Lord. These sentiments can only be the outcome of direct personal experience. Thus Swami Vivekananda was a remarkable personality who had reached the acme of perfection through the paths of both jnana and bhakti.

An Ideal Karma Yogi

Swamiji was involved in incessant activities throughout his short life. He was always kept under a heavy strain of work and lecturing, planning, writing and organizing. It was characteristic of him that once he entered any field of work there was no stopping halfway, nor would he be satisfied with anything short of the final achievement. Bold are his words when he exhorts us to plunge headlong into actions, but have our whole being coated with a layer of detachment.

⁵If only we had the power to detach ourselves at will, there would not be any misery. That man alone will be able to get the best of nature, who, having the power of attaching himself to a thing with all his energy, has also the power to detach himself when he should do so. The difficulty is that there must be as

much power of attachment as that of detachment. There are men who are never attracted by anything. They can never love, they are hard-hearted and apathetic; they escape most of the miseries of life. But the wall never feels misery; the wall never loves, is never hurt; but it is the wall, after all. Surely it is better to be attached and caught, than to be a wall.'

Swamiji urges all to become true karma yogis, never shrinking from duties and responsibilities nor frightened by miseries and oppositions. He often said:

'The whole of life is only a swan song! Never forget those lines-

The lion when stricken to the heart, gives out his mightiest roar.

When smitten on the head, the cobra lifts its hood.

And the majesty of the soul comes forth,

Only when a man is wounded to his depths.'

Swamiji saw the ideal karma yogi in Sri Krishna, the Eternal Driver of the chariot of life, represented through the picture of the powerful figure, holding with one hand the reins of the restive horses harnessed to the war-chariot of the greatest warrior in human history, Arjuna, the other hand raised as the symbol of fearlessness and everlasting hope.

Swamiji once told his friend, Priyanath Sinha: 'Sri Krishna ought to be painted as he really was, the Gita personified; and the central idea of the Gita should radiate from His whole form as He was teaching the path of Dharma to Arjuna, who had been overcome by infatuation and cowardice.'

Swamiji then posed himself in the way in which Sri Krishna should be portrayed, and further said:

'Look here, thus does He hold the bridle of the horses so tight that they are brought to their haunches, with their forelegs fighting the air, and their mouths gaping. This will show a tremendous play of action in the figure of Sri Krishna. His friend, the world-

³ A very influential American woman who used her ample resources and powerful contacts to help serve the work of Swami Vivekananda and the Ramakrishna Order.

⁴ Wife of the world-renowned Norwegian violinist Mr. Ole Bull. She was a devoted disciple of Swami Vivekananda who helped to promote Vedanta in America.

⁵ From the lecture 'Work and Its Secret.'

renowned hero, casting aside his bow and arrows, has sunk down like a coward on the chariot, in the midst of the two armies. And Sri Krishna, whip in one hand and tightening the reins with the other, has turned Himself towards Arjuna, with his child-like face beaming with unworldly love and sympathy, and a calm and serene look, delivering the message of the Gita to His beloved comrade. Now tell me what idea this picture of the Preacher of the Gita conveys to you.'

The friend said: 'Activity combined with firmness and serenity.' Swamiji's rejoinder was; 'Ay, that's it! Intense action in the whole body, and withal a face expressing the profound calmness and serenity of the blue sky! This is the central idea of the Gita - to be calm and steadfast in all circumstances, with one's body, mind and soul centered at his Hallowed Feet!

Swamiji himself was the practical example of this idea - a perfect yogi and a perfect worker at the same time. Adept in yogic practices and meditation, he exemplified, through his most ordinary actions, the truth of the saying of the great German monk, Meister Eckhart:

'In service man gathers the harvest that has been sown in contemplation.... God's purpose in contemplation is fruitfulness in works. ...Activity is a further part of the Unity seen in the vision.'

Fusion of the Three Ideals

Incarnations and world prophets stood for one among the three ideals of jnana, bhakti and karma. They were all great ideals and Swami adored all the avatars that had gone before him: he offered salutations at their feet with the greatest respect, love and humility. But he saw that the task of reconciling and harmonizing the seemingly contradictory ideals and principles of previous teachers and of the ancient texts fell upon his guru, Sri Ramakrishna. The disciple hailed him as 'the establisher of righteousness, the embodiment of all paths of religion and the greatest among incarnations.' In one of his lectures he paid a glowing tribute to his guru thus:

'The one (Shankara) had a great head, the other (Sri Chaitanya) a large heart, and the time was ripe for one to be born, the embodiment of both this head and heart: the time was ripe for one to be born who, in one

body, would have the brilliant intellect of Shankara and the wonderfully expansive, infinite heart of Chaitanya; one who would see in every sect the same spirit working, the same God; one who would see God in every being, one whose heart would weep for the poor, for the weak, for the outcast, for the downtrodden, for everyone in this world, inside India or outside India; and at the same time whose grand, brilliant intellect would conceive of such noble thoughts as would harmonize all conflicting sects, not only in India, but outside India, and bring a marvelous harmony, the universal religion of head and heart, into existence. Such a man was born, and I had the good fortune to sit at his feet for years.

Following in his Master's footsteps, Swamiji performed the most arduous task in the world of religion, namely, the harmonizing of all the important theories and ideals in religion, denouncing or destroying none, but polishing and cleaning all the dross accumulated through the ages. Marie Louise Burke, in her book, *Swami Vivekananda, His Second Visit to the West New Discoveries* remarks about this:

'It was for Swamiji not only to spread Sri Ramakrishna's message of harmony to the world at large but to give it philosophical form.' To substantiate this, she quotes from Sister Nivedita's book, *The Master As I saw Him*:

'Hitherto the three philosophical systems... had been regarded as offering to the soul three different ideals of liberation. No attempt had ever before been made to reconcile these schools. On reaching Madras, however, in 1897, Vivekananda boldly claimed that even the utmost realizations of Dualism and Modified Unism (Qualified Monism) were but stages on the way to Unism (Monism) itself; and the final bliss, for all alike, was the mergence in one without a second. It is said that at one of his midday question and answer classes (at Madras) a member of his audience asked him why, if this was the truth, it had never before been mentioned by any of the Masters The great gathering was startled, on the occasion, to hear the reply (given in both English and Sanskrit): because I was born for this, and it was left to me to do!'

One feels thrilled when one reads these words spoken more than eighty years ago. They were not pompous, hollow words, bubbling with vanity, but

words wrung out of a heart strong and vigorous and sure of what it said and believed. His conviction of the purpose of his advent on earth, strengthened by the tremendous faith and hope his Master had placed in him, based on his own insight, enabled him to utter such words.

The Inspirer

'Never forget the glory of human nature,' Swamiji said one day, 'we are the greatest God...Christ's and Buddha's are but waves on the boundless ocean which I am.'

'Faith, faith, faith in ourselves, faith, faith in God this is the secret of greatness. If you have faith in all the three hundred and thirty millions of your mythological gods, and in all the gods which foreigners have now and again introduced into your midst, and still have no faith in yourselves, there is no salvation for you. Have faith in yourselves, and stand up on that faith and be strong;'

Like a cleansing wind, Swamiji moved over the earth, shaking people to their roots, inspiring and encouraging them with words of power, hope and enthusiasm. But, wherever he went, peace radiated from him and he transmitted it to everyone who came into contact with him. Miss MacLeod once wrote to Mary Hale, 'What a breath of the infinite he always brings with Him!' He communicated this inner poise and serenity to all around him and induced them also to diffuse these qualities wherever they went. In a letter to Nivedita, written on 6 December, 1899, he expresses this:

'The man who really takes the burden blesses the world and goes his own way. He has not a word of condemnation, a word of criticism, not because there was no evil, but that he has taken it on his own shoulders, willingly, voluntarily. It is the Saviour who should "go his way rejoicing, and not the saved" ... Come ye that are heavily laden and lay all your burden on me, and then do whatever you like and be happy and forget that I ever existed.'

Ever conscious of his mission in life, his mind always soaring in the highest realms of Advaitic experience, his whole being incessantly engaged in pure and perfect Karma Yoga, Swamiji always felt himself guided and protected by the hand of Providence. He had the constant unbroken remembrance that his activities were programmed and controlled by the spirit of his Master. Before the

Master gave us his physical body the full outline of his illustrious disciple's life work had been clearly envisaged and laid down. Swamiji experienced the continuous presence of God within and without him. One day he asked a young man, Ralph. 'Can you see your own eyes?' Ralph answered that he could not, except in a mirror. 'God is like that,' Swamiji told him. 'He is as close as your own eyes. He is your own, even though you can't see Him.' Mr. Alan, a Scottish friend, admirer and devotee of Swamiji recounts: 'He once told us that he had such faith in the Divine Mother that if he had to speak on a subject that he knew absolutely nothing about, he would get on his feet, for he knew that Mother would put the words into his mouth.'

In 1900 when the Shanti Ashrama was to be established in California, Swamiji found Swami Turiyananda to be the right person to head this project, and he spoke to him about it. Seeing his brother monk reluctant to take up the assignment, Swamiji told him, 'It is the will of the Divine Mother that you should take charge of the work there.' Swami Turiyananda was amused. He smiled and replied, 'Rather say it is your will. Certainly you have not heard the Mother communicate Her will to you in this matter.' But Swamiji grew grave. 'Yes, brother,' he said. 'If your nerves become very fine, then you will be able to hear Mother's words directly.' He spoke with such fervor that Swami Turiyananda's doubts were stilled.

Swamiji quotes the soul-stirring inspiring words from the immortal song of Krishna: 'Therefore, stand up, O Arjuna, and acquire the glory worthy of a man; overcoming all thwarting obstacles, enjoy the wealth and welfare of your country.'

He then sends out his own appeal to the modern world:

'Arise, awake! Awake from this hypnotism of weakness. None is really weak; the soul is infinite, omnipotent, and omniscient. Stand up, assert yourself, proclaim the God within you, do not deny Him. Teach yourselves, teach everyone his real nature, call upon the sleeping soul and see how it awakes. Power will come, glory will come, goodness will come, and everything that is excellent will come when this sleeping soul is roused to self-conscious activity.'

Rev. Pravrajika Ajayaprana was the first President of the Ramakrishna Sarada Vedanta Society of New South Wales from establishment in Sydney in 1982 until 2011.

The Many Facets of Vivekananda

Amalendu Bagchi

Madison

Swami Vivekananda (Swamiji) is well known as a vedantist and a spiritual leader of modern world. Many Vedic scholars and Indologists compared him with Shankaracharya and Ramanuja - two highly respected spiritual leaders of Hinduism of the 9th century India. Dr. S. Radhakrishnan (1888-1975), first president of India, a well-known philosopher and recipient of Templeton Prize (given for exceptional contribution to life's spiritual dimension) said "If you really believe in the divine spark in man, do not for a moment hesitate to accept the great tradition which has come to us, of which Swami Vivekananda was the greatest exponent". According to A.L. Basham (1914-1986), a well-known historian and Indologist from University of London "Swami Vivekananda .. one of the most significant figures in the whole history of Indian religion, comparable in importance to such great teachers as Shankara and Ramanuja ..". "The paragon of all monastic systems is the Vedanta philosophy, and the paragon of all Vedantic missionaries was the late Swami Vivekananda .." wrote William James (1842-1910), a professor of philosophy at Harvard.

Leo Tolstoy, the famous Russian thinker and philosopher, who was highly regarded by Gandhiji ('owing him much in life'), had great respect for Swamiji. Around 1905 he read two books by Swamiji and wrote in his diary "Since six in the morning I have been thinking of Vivekananda. Yesterday, read Vivekananda whole day. There is a chapter on justification of violent means of resisting the evil. Very talentedly written'. On 7th May 1909, Tolstoy told the editor of Posrednik House, which published many of his books "The most eminent of modern Indian thinkers is Vivekananda and he should be published". In his article 'On Education' Tolstoy mentioned Vivekananda amongst the best thinkers of world alongside Socrates, Rousseau, Kant, etc.

The previous paragraphs cite only a few remarks by well-known personalities who met Swamiji or studied Swamiji's work. Apart from being respected as a spiritualist and great thinker, Swamiji was also a very practical person and had many accomplishments in worldly matters. This article is a glimpse at this multi-faceted persona of Swami Vivekananda.

Jamshedji Tata, the founder of Tata industries in India, was a fellow passenger of Swamiji during his first visit to America in 1893. Swamiji was coming to attend the historic 1893 Parliament of World Religions in Chicago. At that time Jamsedji was involved in export and import businesses. On their way to Chicago, during a visit in a match factory in Japan Swamiji told Jamshedji Tata "Why are you importing matches? If you would start a match factory in India, you would get the profit, many people of your country would be employed, and the money of your country will remain in there". Jamshedji was impressed by the logic of this young Sanyasi. Few years after his return to India Jamshedji started the Tata Iron and Steel Company in a town in the state of Bihar- currently known as Jamshedpur. During a conversation with the author several years ago, Dr. Shankari Prasad Bose, an eminent Vivekananda scholar said that 'after studying the mineral resources and transportation maps of the state of Bihar Swamiji even suggested a place close to Jamshedpur for establishing the iron and steel factory to the geologist working for Jamshedji Tata'. Subsequently in 1898 Jamshedji decided to open a charitable trust with 3 million rupees (1898 valuation) for establishing a post graduate research institute (currently Indian Institute of Science), in Bangalore (currently Bengaluru) to be managed by Indians. However, the then Viceroy of India Lord Curzon opposed establishing such an institution because he wanted to restrict the proliferation of science education in India. After all his

attempts to establish the institute failed, Jamshedji turned to Swamiji, who had gained worldwide fame after his participation at the 1893 Parliament of World Religions in Chicago. He wrote a letter to Swamiji (photocopy of the letter attached) requesting his help. It is interesting to note that the address in the envelope was simply 'Swami Vivekananda, Calcutta'. Swamiji, who was very much in favor of studies in science and technology, told Margaret Noble (aka Sister Nivedita), one of Swamiji's Irish disciples, to help Jamshedji. Sister Nivedita, using her royal connections in England, obtained the permission for establishing the institute as planned by Jamshedji.

In 1899 Swamiji was invited to the Paris religious conference to be held in 1900; this conference was part of the 1900 Paris World Trade fair. He was informed that the proceedings of the conference will be in French. Swamiji learned French in Porbandar during his wondering days as a monk. He toured all over India for about six years, before coming to America. Dr. J.C Bose from Calcutta was invited to the same conference to give a seminar in physics. Swamiji, attracted by the name, had gone to attend the science forum. Since Dr. Bose was speaking in English the audience objected to his presentation. Dr. Bose seemed helpless as he didn't know French. Swamiji went to the podium, introduced himself to Dr. Bose and offered to act as an interpreter. Dr. Bose was very much relieved and resumed his presentation in English. The presentation went well and was highly appreciated by the audience. Thus started the lifelong friendship between two intellectual giants of India - Swami Vivekananda, the world renowned spiritualist, and Dr. Jagadish Chandra Bose, the world renowned scientist (See Note 1).

To the best of author's knowledge, Swamiji knew five languages Sanskrit, Bengali, Hindi, English and French. He also had some working knowledge of Tamil. His could speak Hindi so well that the Maharaja of Kashmir requested him to write a book on Hindu philosophy in Hindi. The famous poet of Bengal - Rabindranath Tagore who was awarded the Nobel prize in literature in 1913, had great praise for Swamiji's Bengali writings; matter of fact Tagore included 'Prachhya O Pashchattya' - written by

Swamiji in Bengali during his voyage to the west, in the syllabus of Bengali literature in Shantiniketan - an educational institution established by Tagore.

John D. Rockefeller is well known as an industrialist and philanthropist. At the time of this incidence Swamiji was a guest of one of Rockefeller's friend in Chicago. At that time Rockefeller had amassed quite a bit of wealth but he was more of a businessman and not a philanthropist as the world knows him today. He refused many requests by his friend to meet Swamiji. However, one day he suddenly walked into the friend's house and entered the room where Swamiji was seated. During their conversation Swamiji told Rockefeller that the money Rockefeller has earned belongs to God, and he should use this money for charitable work. Rockefeller was quite displeased with the audacity of the 'Hindu sanyasi'; he left the room without even saying 'goodbye'. After about a week Rockefeller again went to the friend's house and met Swamiji. He threw a paper at Swamiji's desk which included his plans to donate an enormous sum of money for financing a public institution, and said "Well there you are. You must be satisfied now, and you can thank me for it." Swamiji read the paper patiently and replied "It is for you to thank me." This was Rockefeller's first large donation for public welfare. This is typical of Swami Vivekananda who always encouraged rich persons to undertake charity.

Swamiji was a down to earth person, who had a strong feeling for downtrodden people. During his wondering days he developed friendship with many - poor and rich alike. One such was a poor old lady living in a shanty (probably in Ajmer). Swamiji was her guest for few days during his wondering days. Both used to enjoy 'litti' (thick hand-made tortillas baked in open coal stoves) for dinner. Swamiji called her 'maiyya' (mother). After returning from America he was invited by elites all over India as 'the famous speaker of vedanta' - a well sought after 'monk'. During this tour he visited Ajmer and was staying with a rich person. One day he slipped out of the palace to visit maiyya. She was very delighted to see Swamiji. During their conversation maiyya told

Swamiji “I hear that a famous sanyasi is in town. Have you seen him?” Swamiji replied “what we have to do with famous people. Your son is here. Won't you make some 'litti' ?” The conversation turned to old day reminiscences.

Like his Guru Sri Ramakrishna, Swamiji could express very difficult Vedantic thoughts in a simple language. Following is a testimony. This incidence was narrated by William James of Harvard:

As the audience was coming out after attending Swamiji's lecture on Vedanta at Harvard, a student told his fellow student “I was disappointed by today's lecture.”

Second student, “Why?”

First Student, “We were told that today's speaker is a great man and his thoughts are of high level.”

Second student, “Why do you think he did not deal with high level thoughts?”

First student, “Because I could understand each word of his lecture.”

It is worth mentioning that Swami Vivekananda was offered the position of Chair of Oriental Philosophy at Harvard, but turned it down.

As is well known, Swamiji repeatedly told his monk brothers, disciples and followers to work for the uplifting of women and downtrodden. He was very much involved in such work and created an institution - Ramakrishna Mission, to continue to work for his dream of uplifting the women and downtrodden. The following paragraphs include information regarding recognition of this aspect of his thinking.

In 1973, the bicentennial year of American independence, Smithsonian Institute of Washington D.C. organized an exhibition on 31 prominent foreign visitors, between 1776 to 1914, to U.S.A. Swami Vivekananda was selected as one of the 31 foreign visitors. A book containing observations of these visitors regarding America - 'Abroad in America', was published in 1976. In his article on Swamiji, C. B. Tripathi highlighted Swamiji's observations regarding

American women and masses. Swamiji wrote in a November 1893 letter from Chicago “Asia laid the germs of civilization. Europe developed man, and America is developing women and the masses”.

In 1993, the UNESCO organized a conference on Swami Vivekananda. In his speech, the UNESCO representative observed that 'Swami Vivekananda's thoughts regarding women and human rights are in line with UN charter, except that he spoke about it at the turn of the century - much before the idea was adopted by all nations'.

In conclusion, two of Vivekananda's sayings are included. The first one is a conviction he wanted us to adopt in life and the second one is a poetical expression of his observation regarding India's contribution to the world:

“We are not weak. And if you are weak it is because you love your own weakness.”

“Like the gentle dew that falls unseen and unheard, yet brings into blossom fairest of roses, has been the contribution of India to the thought of the world. Silent, unperceived, yet omnipotent in its effect, it has revolutionized the thought of the world, yet nobody knows when it did so.”

Note 1: Dr. Bose's contribution in physics is an invention considered essential for modern telecommunications which went unrewarded during his lifetime but was later recognized by the scientific community in the 1980s. He was the first to invent the wireless transmission of sound wave (i.e., Radio Transmission). In 1894 he demonstrated the radio transmission to a select audience in the Presidency College in Kolkata. Dr. Bose subsequently gave a lecture regarding the invention at the Royal College in London. However, he never obtained a patent for his invention. G. Markoni and K.F Brown came to know about this work and developed Radio without even mentioning Dr. Bose's work. In 1909 G. Markoni and K.F. Brown was awarded the Nobel Prize for 'inventing' Radio Transmission, bypassing Jagadish Bose as the inventor. However, this mistake of the scientific community was rectified in 1980s by the

Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers (IEEE). Recently, on September 15th 2012, IEEE president, Dr. Peter Staker unveiled a plaque at the Presidency College in Kolkata honoring the Radio Transmission related work of Dr. J.C Bose.

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Why are people so afraid? The answer is that they have made themselves helpless and dependent on others. We are so lazy, we do not want to do anything ourselves. We want a Personal God, a Savior or a Prophet to do everything for us.

With Best Wishes from

Shompita and Soumyabrata Bhattacharya & Family

The Caste System and Swami Vivekananda

Alak Bhattacharyya

Glen Ellyn, Illinois

Introduction: Narendranath Dutta, later known as Swami Vivekananda, analyzed the Hindu religious teachings and practices intensely. He was a proud Hindu who found nothing but gems in Hindu scriptures; however, he was also ashamed of many ignorant practices. He was not timid to highlight the glory of the Hindu culture. On the other hand, he was not hesitant to analyze the Hindu culture in the light of the advances and failures of the western religion and culture. The caste system in India is one of the most misunderstood ancient cultures. It is misunderstood by most Indians and by non-Indians who criticize it frequently improperly. Swami Vivekananda had given an immense amount of thoughts on caste in India in the light of Hinduism, history, and similar practices in disguise in other cultures. Here is an attempt to understand the caste system in light of what Swami Vivekananda perceived and wrote.

Background: As a boy, Narendranath was always bold and straight forward. He studied scriptures of all religions and became fascinated with the concept of a god, but he had his doubts. He asked many religious leaders of all denominations including Shri Ramakrishna, “*Have you seen God?*” He preferred the unambiguous “Yes” only from Ramkrishna. During this period, Narendranath was already an expert on Vedas, Upanishads, and Gita. It would be interesting to analyze what he read in Hindu scriptures about the caste system. The most direct instruction about caste system is in the Bhagavad Gita, 4:13 [1]. Here Krishna said, “*Caturvarnyam maya srstam gunakarma vibhagasah,*” meaning - the fourfold varna (varna = color = division = caste?) was created by Me based by the different distribution of gunas and karma. (The three gunas are Sattva, Rajas, and Tamas). Thus, only two words describe the caste: gunas and karma or qualities (qualification) and action (skill). There is no mention of janma (by birth) here. This

teaching influenced Vivekananda as we will see later how he tried to explain his position on caste culture in India [2].

Thy Flesh and Blood: One of the most quoted lines from Vivekananda's writing is the following: “*Oh India!..Forget not that thy marriage, thy wealth, thy life are not for self-pleasure - 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 ...[2].*” It is clear where Swamiji stood in his thoughts about the caste. He unequivocally urged over a century ago that all Hindus must think that the people belonging to the so-called lower caste are “*thy flesh and blood, thy brothers.*”



Caste Served its Purpose: Needless to say Swamiji had a clear understanding of the ancient history of the caste system in India. He knew how it evolved from the innovative design of a thriving, complete society equipped with spiritual knowledge, administration, business, and service, all based on qualification and action. He looked at the whole world and felt that is exactly the goal of any functional society. A modern country today has all those four functions. Even a corporation runs with the same general structure: Executives (Kshatriya), Technology (Brahmins), Marketing/Sales (Vaishya), and Manufacturing/Service (Shudra). If you take out one of those four Varnas, the country or the corporation will fail. He wrote [3], *"Though our castes and our institutions are apparently linked with our religion, they are not so. These institutions have been necessary to protect us as a nation.....There was a time when I used to think that many of them were useless and worthless; but the older I grew, the more I seem to feel a diffidence in cursing any one of them, for each of them is the embodiment of the experience of centuries."* The misunderstanding on caste system was such, Swamiji often used to feel frustrated. One clear aspect of Swamiji's writings is his bold style and simple examples. He tried to eliminate all ambiguities from his analysis. He said [3] to his countrymen, *"...some people whose knowledge of their own scriptures and whose capacity to understand the mighty plans of the ancients are only zero."* Towards his international audiences, he said [3], *"A child of but yesterday, destined to die the day after tomorrow, comes to me and asks me to change all my plans; and if I hear the advice of that baby and change all my surroundings according to his ideas, I myself should be a fool, and no one else. Much of the advice that is coming to us from different countries is similar to this. Tell these wiseacres - I will hear you when you have made a stable society yourselves....First form a stable society like ours. First make laws and institutions that remain undiminished in their power through scores of centuries. Then will be the time to talk on the subject with you, but till then my friend, you are only a giddy child."*

In March 25, 1896, Swamiji said, *"It is an imperfect institution, no doubt. But if it had not been for caste, you would have had no Sanskrit book to study. This caste*

made walls, around which all sorts of invasions rolled and surged, but found it impossible to breakthrough."

The Brahmana and The Brahmanya: The qualities which make a Brahmana, Kshatriya, Vaishya, and Shudra are inherent in every man [4]. In reply to Shri Priya Nath Sinha's question in Balaram Basu's Calcutta house on Gunas and Brahmana the following quote from Swamiji is enlightening: *"As there are Sattva, Rajas, and Tamas - one or other of these gunas more or less - in every man, so qualities which make a Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya, or Shudra are inherent in every man, more or less. But at times one or the other of these qualities predominates in him in varying degrees, and it is manifested accordingly. Take a man in his different pursuits, for example: when he is engaged in serving another for pay he is in Shudrahood; when he is busy transacting some piece of business for profit, on his own account, he is a Vaishya; when he fights to right wrongs, then the qualities of Kshatriya come out in him; and when he meditates on God or passes his time in conversation about him, then he is a Brahmin. Naturally, it is quite possible for one to be changed from one caste in to another. Otherwise how did Vishvamitra become a Brahmin and Parashurama a Kshatriya?"* Swamiji clearly followed the teachings of Gita: *"Caturvarnyam maya srstam gunakarma vibhagasah."* Even more directly Swamiji wrote in an 1889 letter, *"...But seeing that we find clear proofs about caste being based on qualification both in the Bhishmaparva of the Mahabharata and in the stories there of the Ajagara and of Uma and Maheshvara...."*

In response to another question of Shri Priya Nath Sinha on Brahminhood, Swamiji was very transparent, *"... the son of a Brahmin is not necessarily always a Brahmin; though there is every possibility of his being one, he may not become so.....The Brahmin caste and Brahmanya qualities are two different things."*

Swamiji always considered all his disciples, Indians or non-Indians, who engaged in Sattvic thoughts and actions are Brahmins. We can always ask a question who is a better Brahmin: Swami Vivekananda or a Brahmin's son detached from any kind of spiritual activity and immersed in Tamas?

The Brahmana and The Kshatriya: In Swami Vivekananda's analysis, the caste system exists in every country. It is a fundamental fabric of a functional society. However, he had a very interesting hypothesis. He believed that unlike in India, in other countries, especially European countries, it is the Kshatriyas who get the highest honor. He said [5]: *"It put, theoretically at least, the whole of India under the guidance - not of wealth, nor of the sword but of intellect - intellect chastened and controlled by spirituality. The leading caste in India is the highest of the Aryans - the Brahmins.....Though apparently different from the social methods of other nations, on close inspection, the Aryan method of caste will not be found so very different except on two points: First, in many other countries the highest honor belongs to the Kshatriya - the man of the sword.....in India the highest honor belongs to the man of peace - the Shahman, the Brahmin, the man of God. Secondly, the difference of unit. The law of caste in every other country takes the individual man or woman as the sufficient unit.....Here the unit is all the members of a caste community."*

The Vaishya and The Shudra: Swami Vivekananda did not write a lot about the Vaishyas. While most Brahmins were too busy with exploiting their spirituality and most Kshatriyas were too busy exploiting their power, the Vaishyas were quietly conducting commerce, trade, agriculture, and creating wealth, mostly for themselves. It is the Shudras, the outcastes like the chandalas, and the very poor in general, for whom his heart ached. He said [6], *"...oh, 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 ..They sink lower and lower every day, they feel the blows showered upon them by a cruel society, and they do not know whence the blow comes...."*

Swamiji was not interested in the blame game. He knew blaming upper castes and the religion itself for the misery of the lowest caste and the poor is a leisure and uninformed activity of the weak. It does not produce any result. He said [11], *"The solution is not by bringing down the higher, but by raising the lower up to the level of the higher. And that is the line of work that is found in all our books."* He insisted on interested

people to follow the books and see examples of how some Shudras, by imitating the manners and customs of Brahmins, did well. Swamiji asked his disciples to encourage this behavior [11]. He spoke about [6], *"A hundred thousand men and women, fired with the zeal of holiness, fortified with eternal faith in the Lord, and nerved to lion's courage by their sympathy for the poor and the fallen and the downtrodden, will go over the length and breadth of the land, preaching the gospel of salvation, the gospel of help, the gospel of social raising-up - the gospel of equality."*

It did happen. The beginning of the 20th century began with the message of, *"Jibay prem kore jai jon, sei jon shebichha iswar."* Swami Vivekananda's message made a drastic upward movement of the lower castes through greater awareness, hope, encouragement, seva, and education of all four castes. Before Swamiji passed away, he knew that his work had just begun.

So What to Do: In Swamiji's own words, *"The Vedanta was (and is) the boldest system of religion. It stopped no where, and it had one advantage. There was no body of priests who sought to suppress every man who tried to tell the truth. There was absolute religious freedom. In India, the bondage of superstitions is a social one [7].....The idea that one man is born superior to another has no meaning in the Vedanta [8]."*

Swamiji's thoughts on caste were very clear and had no conflict with Vedanta. He wrote, *"Caste is a natural order. I can perform one duty in social life, and you another; you can govern a country, and I can mend a pair of shoes; but that is no reason why you are greater than I, for can you mend my shoes? Can I govern the country? I am clever in mending shoes, you are clever in reading Vedas; but that is no reason why you should trample on my head.....This will have to go. 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. They should be knocked on the head ...It is the nature of the society to form itself groups; and what will go will be these privileges!....And that is what we want: no privilege for any one, equal chances for all; let everyone be taught that*

the Divine is within and everyone will work out his salvation [9]....Thus, trampling on every privilege and everything in us that works for privilege, let us work for that knowledge which will bring the feeling of sameness towards all mankind[10].”

Conclusion: Swami Vivekananda wrote and spoke immensely on caste culture in India. He mentioned the universal need for a caste in any society for proper functioning as human society needs spirituality, administration, commerce, and service. The intention of the sages to build a functional society based on qualifications and actions survived scores of centuries albeit misunderstanding, misuse, and injustice. His heart ached for the lowest caste and the poor. His idea for solving the injustice was not to bring down the upper caste, but to uplift the lower. Armed with the teachings of Vedanta, he wanted his countrymen to awake and work towards equality of all mankind.

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Hold to the idea, “I am not the mind, I see that I am thinking, I am watching my mind act,” and each day the identification of yourself with thoughts and feelings will grow less, until at last you can entirely separate yourself from the mind and actually know it to be apart from yourself.

With Best Wishes from

Subrata, Anita, Souvik and Candice De

Swami Vivekananda's Views on Women

Subhasis Laha

Swami Vivekananda came to the world stage at a time when the influence of western education, thinking and culture was changing India in fundamental ways in almost all aspects of life, including gender role, social norms, education, literature, music, the arts, performing arts and science. He was the first Indian who had the chance to closely observe western women in various walks of life. As a result of having seen both sides of the world, his unique viewpoint allowed him to identify the primary traits of Indian and Western women. He recognized that *"The ideal woman in India is the mother, the mother first, and the mother last. The word woman calls up to the mind of the Hindu, motherhood; and God is called Mother. ... To the ordinary man in India, the whole force of womanhood is concentrated in motherhood. ... In an Indian home, the mother rules."*

In contrast, he said about Western women: *"In the West, the woman is wife. The idea of womanhood is concentrated there - as the wife. ... In the Western home, the wife rules."*

Over a century has passed since Swamiji made this statement. The role of Western women still remains mostly unchanged, though it can be argued that motherhood in western society is no longer as secondary as Vivekananda had described. However, in many ways, the world has become far more homogenous and the role of woman as wife is far more important and recognized in India today than it was in Vivekananda's time. Another description by Swamiji of his treatment towards his mother brings home how much the customs in Indian society have changed over time: *"As children, every day, when we are boys, we have to go early in the morning with a little cup of water and place it before the mother, and mother dips her toe into it and we drink it."*

His own saintly mother, Bhuvaneshwari Devi, was the embodiment of the ideal womanhood to him



because of her spirituality, dedication and sacrifice. He exclaimed: *"I know that before I was born, my mother would fast and pray and do hundreds of things which I could not even do for five minutes. She did that for two years. ... Whatever good impulse I have was given to me by my mother - and consciously, not unconsciously."* Swamiji narrated how his mother devoted her life to serve others: *"someone knocks at the door and says, 'Guest', and there is no food except what was for my mother. She would give that to him willingly and then wait for her own. That was her life and she liked it."*

Swamiji was also impressed by Western women, many of whom were very generous and kind in supporting his stay in the West and later became his devotees and disciples. He expressed his deep appreciation for and gratitude towards Western

women: *"I have seen thousands of women here whose hearts are as pure and stainless as snow. Oh, how free they are! It is they who control social and civic duties. Schools and colleges are full of women... Their kindness to me is immeasurable."*

However, it was difficult for him to fully accept this very different role of women in the West: *"In the West, the women did not very often seem to me to be women at all, they appeared to be quite the replicas of men! Driving vehicles, drudging in offices, attending schools, doing professional duties!"* By and large, Swamiji was a person who was ahead of his time in his thinking; at the same time, he was influenced by some of the predominant views of that period. He was not happy when Western women parted ways with their spouses: *"Where is the American woman as mother? ... Where is she who would give me twenty times her life, if I had need? ... Where is she, in comparison with her, who goes to the divorce court the moment I treat her a little badly?"* We can see in other places as well that he would single out women with faults that could have been caused as much by men.

Swami Vivekananda was never shy in speaking his mind about such issues and was rather emphatic in expressing his views. This contrasts with the humble ways of a typical Indian monk. Just as a pure semiconductor element requires a little impurity or "doping" to function as a useful electronic device, perhaps monk Vivekananda's saintly soul needed some "doping" of the human element to prepare him for the unique role of braving uncharted and sometimes unfriendly territory to spread his Universal gospel. To appreciate this aspect of his personality, we need to remember that he was not an armchair monk, but the very first person to single-handedly carry the message of Hinduism and Indian culture to the far West.

Swami Vivekananda traveled the world, but his heart was always focused on India. He raised his powerful voice to protect Indian women from the neglect that was pervasive in contemporary Indian society. He declared: *"That country and that nation which do not respect women have never become great, nor will ever be in future."* He realized that proper

education was essential for the uplift of Indian women: *"Know for certain that absolutely nothing can be done to improve the state of things, unless there is spread of education first among the women and the masses. ... It is only in the homes of educated and pious mothers that great men are born. And you have reduced your women to something like manufacturing machines."* He was passionate about setting up "Math" (an educational and religious residence) for women, where both spiritual knowledge and worldly skills would be taught. Swamiji invited Sister Nivedita to India to work for Indians, especially women, and assigned her the role of running the Sister Nivedita Girls' School. This institution lit one of the first lamps of education among women in India.

He would not tolerate men dictating the lives of women: *"Educate your women first and leave them to themselves; then they will tell you what reforms are necessary for them. In matters concerning them, who are you?"* Being a fearless spirit himself, he wanted the Indian women to be strong as well: *"They have all the time been trained in helplessness, servile dependence on others... Along with other things they should acquire the spirit of valour and heroism."*

Swami Vivekananda recognized the perils of childhood marriage: *"Early marriage leads to premature child-bearing, which accounts for most of our women dying early."* He was also fully cognizant of the differences between the emerging and the traditional views of marriage:

"On one side, new India is saying, 'We should have full freedom in the selection of husband and wife; because the marriage, in which are involved the happiness and misery of all our future life, we must have the right to determine according to our own free will.'"

On the other, old India is dictating, 'Marriage is not for sense-enjoyment, but to perpetuate the race... By the producing of children, you are contributing to, and are responsible for, the future good or evil of the society. Hence society has the right to dictate whom you shall marry and whom you shall not. ... You give up your desire of individual pleasure for the good of the many.'" He emphasized that, if individual pleasure becomes the

only goal of marriage, proper upbringing of children is not possible, leading to the destruction of the social fabric. Unfortunately, this phenomenon has become more commonplace in today's society, with many parents sadly lacking focus on a good upbringing for their children.

Swamiji realized that there are many things to learn from the West, but simply copying Western ways without discrimination can be harmful: *"That man or that society which has nothing to learn is already in the jaws of death. Yes, learn we must many things from the West: but there are fears as well."* Above all, he strongly believed in the values of the Indian culture—the ideals of spirituality, sacrifice and self-control. He warned against the "individualistic" bias of the Western society and encouraged everyone to embrace the "socialistic" focus of India that places the interest of the society above the pleasure of an individual. When he was asked what he would say to the women of India, he replied: *"To the women of this country, I would say exactly what I say to the men. Believe in India and in our Indian faith. Be strong and hopeful and unashamed, and remember that with something to take, Hindus have immeasurably more to give than any other people in the world."*

Today life has changed so much from Swamiji's time and is continuing to change on a global scale, at a rapid pace. Though the trait of motherhood from the

biological standpoint has remained fundamentally unchanged with the passage of time, other womanly traits that are derived largely from society, culture, religion and economy are inherently dynamic. We can only speculate what Swamiji would say to today's women. It is certain that his message to modern women would be based on the same core principles as he expounded over a century ago: *"I should very much like our women to have your intellectuality, but not if it must be at the cost of purity. ... Intellectuality is not the highest good. Morality and spirituality are the things for which we strive."* He had high appreciation for the role of Western women outside their home: *"They go to market, school, and college, earn money and do all kinds of work. ... I cannot do a sixteenth part of what they do"*. It follows that he would have welcomed the increasing gender equality of today's men and women in all aspects of life. He would have challenged every woman to be the ideal mother, wife and daughter at home and the ideal human being outside of home, with morality and spirituality being the guiding star of life; likewise, he would have summoned every man to be the ideal father, husband and son at home and the ideal human being at large. Swamiji probably had today's gender equality in his vision when he said: *"We should not think that we are men and women; but only that we are human beings, born to cherish and to help one another."*



*This is the first lesson to learn: be determined
not to curse anything outside, not to lay the
blame upon anyone outside, but stand up, lay
the blame on yourself. You will find that is
always true. Get hold of yourself.*

With Best Wishes from

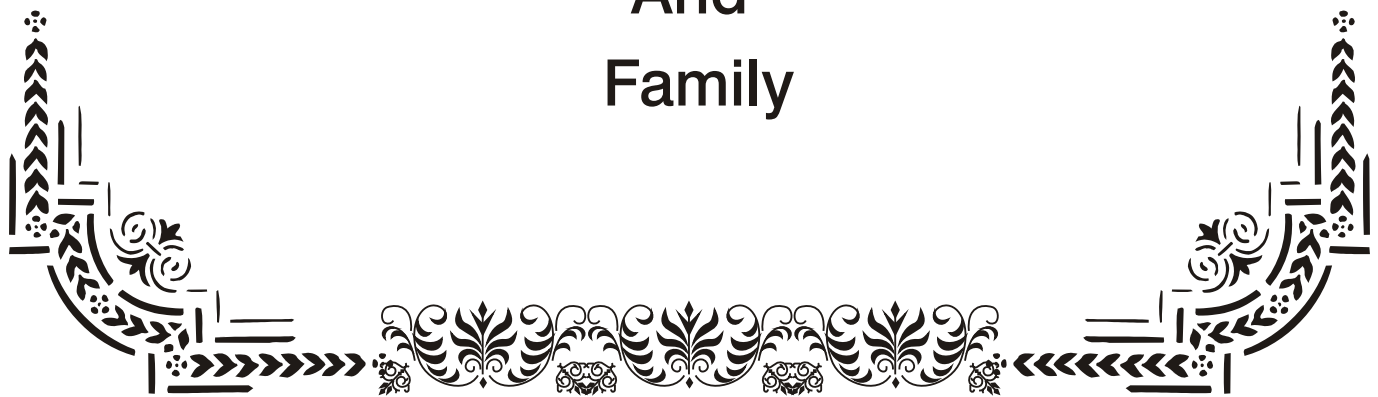
Sunayana and Ming Jen Yang & Family



It is our own mental attitude which makes the world what it is for us. Our thought make things beautiful, our thoughts make things ugly. The whole world is in our own minds. Learn to see things in the proper light. First, believe in this world -- that there is meaning behind everything. Everything in the world is good, is holy and beautiful. If you see something evil, think that you are not understanding it in the right light. throw the burden on yourselves!

With Best Wishes from

**Geeti and Partha Ghosh
And
Family**



Vivekananda — The Practical Vedantin

Devipriya Roy

*Awake, arise, and dream no more!
This is the land of dreams, where Karma
Weaves unthreaded garlands with our thoughts
Of flowers sweet or noxious, and none
Has root or stem, being born in naught, which
The softest breath of Truth drives back to
Primal nothingness. Be bold, and face
The Truth! Be one with it! Let visions cease,
Or, if you cannot, dream but truer dreams,
Which are Eternal Love and Service Free.*

— Sw. Vivekananda, **To The Awakened India**

The 21st century-it is a time for monumental growth as well as monumental decay. These are confusing times when human civilization is moving forward in giant strides reaching out to the farthest corners of the distant galaxies, bringing in ever new creature comforts to human life and yet humanity as a whole seems to have lost its direction, casting about aimlessly for glory, self vindication from war to war and sliding in a downward spiral of greed and violence. Countless among us are mired in abject poverty, while a few scramble to grab all the riches they can lay their hands on. Ever improving communication systems has made it possible for most of us to be in constant touch with the others, yet none can explain why we feel locked in isolation by our anxiety, loneliness and anger. Haunted by an inexorable sense of drifting apart and doom, we convene global meetings, raise huge amounts for humanitarian aid and run self help programs. But somehow the problems keep on running ahead of us. Perhaps it is time to accept the fact that no amount of these aforementioned praiseworthy practical measures are enough to combat the tragedies besetting us. The key to the solution lies elsewhere. As pointed out by Swami Vivekananda,

that perfect disciple of that great spiritual master Thakur Sree Sree Ramkrishna Paramahansa, our maladies can only be cured by drawing sustenance from our spiritual roots-by developing the Advaitic outlook, Vivekananda had imbibed the message of Advaita philosophy under the tutelage of his guru and drawing upon its lessons, had mapped out the path, that can be the perfect solution of the woes of the modern world.

Traditionally Advaita Vedanta has not been known to deal with practical problems of the material world, rather it has been known as a roadmap to extricate oneself from the material world. Adi Sankaracharya, who first propounded it, preached it as a philosophy of disengagement. . Based on Upanisadic revelations, especially on the four great sayings or Mahavakyas¹, the Advaita philosophy emphasizes the unity behind diversity. The diverse objects and beings in the universe are always in transit, they come and go, they are born and then they die. In other words, they keep on appearing and disappearing, and therefore are not permanently or Absolutely Real. The only Reality, the ancient sages of India had concluded is a limitless, eternal Energy or Existence,

which always remains the same. They called it Brahman, (the Big)² Drawing on this argument, Sankar declared that there is no real duality, no real diversity. Whenever we perceive difference or diversity, we are under the spell of Brahman's unique capacity to delude (Maya) and consequently we are being ignorant (Ajnani), whenever we perceive differences. The Goal of human life, according to Sankara was to go beyond such ignorance and rediscover our unity with the Absolutely Real and non dual Existence or Brahman. Naturally, Shankar's focus has never been on this world, but on the Supreme Infinitude beyond. He taught us to change our perspective and shun the world of impermanence and divergence, thus achieving freedom or moksha from the cycle of repeated rebirths and thereby merge ourselves in Infinity- the supreme non dual blissful existence or Brahman.

Vivekananda, was initiated into the Advaita philosophy by his master Thakur Sree Ramakrishna. Unlike Ankara, who never identified Brahman by a name or gender, Thakur, who was steeped in the Vedanta philosophy as well as Sakta sadhana, called the Supreme non dual Reality the Universal Mother- Ma. To him, the eternal, limitless consciousness was the eternal mother or Ma who has transformed Herself in this universe, and consequently, he felt total identification with all things, animate or inanimate of this world. We come across anecdotes from Thakur's life, when his skin got bruised if a person wrung a wet towel in his vicinity or trampled on tender green grass. Once his cheek showed red welts as someone delivered a sharp slap on the cheek of a nearby person. Learning from his Guru, Vivekananda found in the Advaita philosophy, the perfect inspiration and encouragement to shake off the sloth of the soul and to get engaged in setting right the injustices of everyday world. Thus it was Sw. Vivekananda's unique interpretation that changed the message of Advaita Vedanta to one of "Social Activism"

After Thakur Ramkrishna passed away, his grief stricken disciples felt lost and rudderless in the world. They roomed together in Kashipur engaging in spiritual practice and seeking comfort from each other

for a while, until the unbearable grief sent young Vivekananda on a journey of his own. He adopted the life of a Paribrajak ((travelling spiritual aspirant) touring around the country. The sorry state he found his motherland in both infuriated and saddened this energetic passionate and brilliant young man.

India in the 19th cen, though not riddled by the maladies of the present age, had much to lament for. Centuries of foreign domination had decimated not only our national wealth, but had sapped our confidence in ourselves. Social ills had ripped up the fabric of the nation. Having forgotten the all inclusive universal legacy of Upanisadic Hinduism, we had been clinging to superstitions and rituals in the name of religion. Casteism and the resultant inequality among the social classes coupled with abject material and psychological poverty, had gripped the entire nation. A few social reform



programs had indeed started by this time, yet they were a long way off from the rejuvenation needed by the nation. As he roamed around our ravaged land, Swamiji was at once overcome with sorrow for his fellow countrymen, and yet he was impressed by the innate nobility and generosity of people in every walk of life from the royal palace to the shanty of the social outcast. Brahman, the eternal immortal Supreme Reality, he came to realize was not to be found in a world of abstraction, turning away from the world of mortals. He coined the term of "Naranarayan" to indicate that Narayan or the Supreme Ruler of the universe does not reside in the celestial region of Vaikuntha high above us. Vivekananda's Narayan took residence in the form of each and every human being.

"The moment I have realized God sitting in the temple of every human body, the moment I stand in reverence before every human being and see God in him - that moment I am free from bondage, everything that binds vanishes, and I am free."

He berated the philosopher, who declared the human life to be as worthless and impermanent as a drop of water teetering on the edge of a rough lotus leaf, following Shankaracharya's "Mohamudgara", and asked him,

"Bahurupe sammukhe tomar chhari kotha tumi khunjicho Ishwar?

Jive daya kare jeijon, seijon sevichhe Ishwar"

"Why do you fail to recognize the incarnate forms of the Divinity in front of you.. Worshipping them stands for Divine Worship."

But while he had no patience with the otherworldly philosophers and scholars, he did not take kindly to those, who looked at the material progress of the western countries as the way forward for India. What Swamiji wanted was active participation in the service of the poor and needy as part of spiritual worship. Such service, he felt was the our natural spiritual legacy. Scoffing at the faugh modernists, he said, **"What we possessed as our own is all passing away, and yet, all that we have learnt**

from foreigners is the art of speechifying. Merely reading and talking! - only talking and talking, and bandying words...They are nowhere, when a lot of real practical work is required - over and above that, they are barking at each other and fighting among themselves all the days of their life"

Of course, Swamiji was not against western civilization itself. As he came to America to address the Parliament of Religions, he came to recognize the tremendous progress the West had made in the past centuries not only in the material world but also in the fields of arts and literature. He admired the courage, the vitality, the dignity and the self confidence of the western man, especially the respect they accorded to their women,

"The grace of both Lakshmi (goddess of fortune) and Sarasvati (goddess of learning) now shines on the peoples of the Western countries. "But he reminds us that "We also had that trait once - when there was wealth and prosperity in the land. We have now too much poverty, but, to make matters worse, we are courting our ruin in two ways - namely, we are throwing away what we have as our own, and labouring in vain to make others' ideals and habits ours. Those national virtues that we had are gradually disappearing, and we are not acquiring any of the Western ones either." The deep divide between man and man runs in the west as deep if not deeper than in India.

"Even the most educated people of other countries turn up their noses at an angle of forty-five degrees and call our religion idolatry. I have seen that; and they never stopped to think what a mass of superstition there was in their own heads. It is still so everywhere, this tremendous sectarianism, the low narrowness of the mind. The thing which a man has is the only thing worth having; the only life worth living is his own little life of dollar-worship and mammon-worship; the only little possession worth having is his own property, and nothing else. If he can manufacture a little clay nonsense or invent a machine, that is to be admired beyond the greatest possessions. That is

the case over the whole world in spite of education and learning. But education has yet to be in the world, and civilisation - civilisation has begun nowhere yet."

It did not escape Swamiji's keen vision that the materially and scientifically advanced West was gradually coming to same conclusion as the ancient spiritual tradition of India,

"the modern researches of the West have demonstrated through physical means the oneness and the solidarity of the whole universe; how physically speaking, you and I, the sun, the moon, and stars are but little waves or wavelets in the midst of an infinite ocean of matter; how Indian psychology demonstrated ages ago that similarly both body and mind are but mere names or little wavelets in the ocean of matter, the Samasthi; and how going one step further, it is also shown in the Vedanta that behind that idea of the unity of the whole show, the real Soul is one."

Salvation for the degenerate humanity could only come from this ancient knowledge of Vedanta. In this, we as Indians are especially lucky, because we have always been in possession of "the one great life giving idea..which the mute masses of India want for their uplifting, for none can regenerate this land of ours without the practical application and effective operation of this ideal of the oneness of things." "I have said before that our education, intelligence, and thought are all spiritual, all find expression in religion. In the West, their manifestation is in the external - in the physical and social planes. Thinkers in ancient India gradually came to understand that that idea of separateness was erroneous, that there was a connection among all those distinct objects - there was a unity which pervaded the whole universe - trees, shrubs, animals, men, Devas, even God Himself; the Advaitin reaching the climax in this line of thought declared all to be but the manifestations of the One. In reality, the metaphysical and the physical universe are one, and the name of this One is Brahman; and the perception of separateness is an error - they called it

Mâyâ, Avidyâ or nescience. This is the end of knowledge."

According to Swamiji, the revival of the humanity of man has to start from India, because only India retains this ancient knowledge that can redeem all. He says,

"Political greatness or military power is never the mission of our race; it never was, and, mark my words, it never will be. But there has been the other mission given to us, which is to conserve, to preserve, to accumulate, as it were, into a dynamo, all the spiritual energy of the race, and that concentrated energy is to pour forth in a deluge on the world whenever circumstances are propitious. Let the Persian or the Greek, the Roman, the Arab, or the Englishman march his battalions, conquer the world, and link the different nations together, and the philosophy and spirituality of India is ever ready to flow along the new-made channels into the veins of the nations of the world. The Hindu's calm brain must pour out its own quota to give to the sum total of human progress. India's gift to the world is the light spiritual." (East and West)

This is not militant Hinduism. This is not aggression against other religions. Rather it is a step forward to mutual understanding. Swamiji firmly declared, "...no civilisation can grow unless fanaticism, bloodshed and brutality stop. No civilisation can begin to lift up its head until we look charitably upon one another and the first step towards that"..is to "be positively helpful to each other, however different our religious ideas and convictions may be."

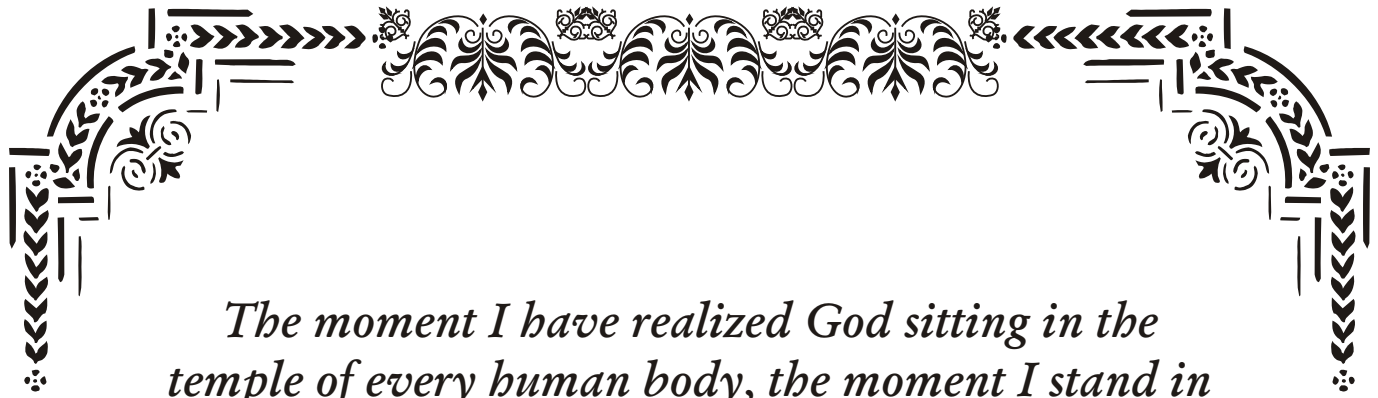
India is uniquely suited to transmit this lesson to others, because "herein is the explanation of the most remarkable phenomenon that is only witnessed here - all the various sects, apparently hopelessly contradictory, yet living in such harmony. You may be a dualist, and I may be a monist. You may believe that you are the eternal servant of God, and I may declare that I am one with God Himself; yet both of us are good Hindus"

Not only among ourselves, but we have been taught treat other religions respectfully, despite all cases of aggression against our own. "The little toleration that is in the world, the little sympathy that is yet in the world for religious thought, is practically here in the land of the Aryan, and nowhere else. It is here that Indians build temples for Mohammedans and Christians; nowhere else... The one great lesson, therefore, that the world wants most, that the world has yet to learn from India, is the idea not only of toleration, but of sympathy. Well has it been said in the *Mahimna-stotra*: "As the different rivers, taking their start from different mountains, running straight or crooked, at last come unto the ocean, so, O Shiva, the different paths which men take through different tendencies, various though they appear, crooked or straight, all lead unto These." Though they may take various roads, all are on the ways. Some may run a little crooked, others may run straight, but at last they will all come unto the Lord, the One. Then and then alone, is your Bhakti of Shiva complete when you not only see Him in the Linga, but you see Him everywhere. He is the sage, he is the lover of Hari who sees Hari in everything and in everyone. If you are a real lover of Shiva, you must see Him in everything and in everyone. You must see that every worship is given unto Him whatever may be the name or the form; that all knees bending towards the Caaba, or kneeling in a Christian church, or in a Buddhist temple are kneeling to Him whether they know it or not, whether they are conscious of it or not; that in whatever name or form they are offered, all these flowers are laid at His feet; for He is the one Lord of

all, the one Soul of all souls. He knows infinitely better what this world wants than you or I. It is impossible that all difference can cease; it must exist; without variation life must cease. It is this clash, the differentiation of thought that makes for light, for motion, for everything. Differentiation, infinitely contradictory, must remain, but it is not necessary that we should hate each other therefore; it is not necessary therefore that we should fight each other."

The idea of Vedanta was then the only way of redemption for Human weal and woes according to Swami Vivekananda. It is with this firm conviction that he called upon all of his countrymen to rediscover the idea of one among many to practice in their own lives and to teach it to the world.

"Therefore we have again to learn the one central truth that was preached only here in our Motherland, and that has to be preached once more from India. Why? Because not only is it in our books, but it runs through every phase of our national literature and is in the national life. Here and here alone is it practiced every day, and any man whose eyes are open can see that it is practiced here and here alone. Thus we have to teach religion. There are other and higher lessons that India can teach, but they are only for the learned. The lessons of mildness, gentleness, forbearance, toleration, sympathy, and brotherhood, everyone may learn, whether man, woman, or child, learned or unlearned, without respect of race, caste, or creed. "They call Thee by various names; Thou art One."



The moment I have realized God sitting in the temple of every human body, the moment I stand in reverence before every human being and see God in him—that moment I am free from bondage, everything that binds vanishes, and I am free.

With Best Wishes from

**Manisha and Shyamal Bose
And
Family**



Swami Vivekananda's Views on Education

Dhiman Chakraborty

It is fair to say that all of the many great men who brought about the “renaissance” of Bengal during latter half of the 19th century recognized education of the masses as the single most important necessity toward lifting India back to the glorious place that it once held millennia before among the world's leading civilizations. Each had his own views and opinions on what the goal should be and how it should be pursued. It can well be argued that of all those, the one who formulated the most comprehensive plan, articulated it most forcefully, and set about putting it into practice, is none other than Swami Vivekananda. In this article, I shall try to briefly summarize Swamiji's views on education collected in the volume “Shiksha Prasanga”, or “On Education”, published by *Udbodhan* on behalf of the *Belur Shri Ramakrishna Math*, and examine their relevance from today's global perspective.

One of Swamiji's most oft-quoted sayings, “Education is the manifestation of perfection already in man”, is indeed his succinct definition of “Education”. Firmly rooted in Vedanta, he asserts that as the most advanced of all living beings, every human is born with an endless reserve of divine power in him¹. Education is merely the discovery of that power, or knowledge, so it can be applied to the uplifting of the individual and the society. Learning is not achieved merely by reading books and gathering information, but by focusing one's will power and letting it flourish to its full potential. Swamiji argues that the role of the teacher is not to try to guide the progress along a pre-determined course, which is bound to fail, but only to remove the obstacles from the course that the development chooses spontaneously, and to provide a wholesome atmosphere for it to proceed. In this context, Swamiji cautions us against trying to emulate

great men and women to the extent where it becomes mimicking. He notes that those great people didn't become great not by mimicking others, but by each responding wholeheartedly to his own calling.

The way to achieve this, according to Swamiji, is to bring the mind and body under one self's complete control through the practice of strict discipline. This is essential for the mind to be able to focus, and it must begin with the practice of “brahmacharya” until one is ready to enter the next phase of his life, namely “garhasthya”. The measure of one's education is in the sharpness to which he can focus his mind and devote it wholly to the task at hand, not in the amount of information stored in his skull. Thus, he argues, a cleaning lady who lifts her work to the level of worship by paying undivided attention and full effort to it is better educated than a so-called “pundit” who has merely memorized a number of books and makes a show of passing that on to his pupils while his mind is scattered on other thoughts.

As to the purpose of education, Swamiji puts it quite plainly, that gaining knowledge is the ultimate goal of human life. Everything else—pleasure, happiness, material comfort—is transient, only knowledge persists. One who has attained true knowledge is unperturbed by the coming and passing of joy and sorrow. That equanimity is indeed the sign of true knowledge. Will is all-powerful. A strong will can make a person whatever he wants to be. In order to wield strong will, one needs to have strong character, pure and free of all sins. One needs to keep his senses open and rely on his judgment, not follow dictats blindly, in separating right from wrong. Expansion is life, narrowness is death; love is life, hatred is death. We must expand our hearts and welcome integration

¹ Henceforth the word “he”, “him” etc. should be treated as gender-neutral unless specified or obviously implied by the context otherwise.

of diversity, eschewing division, discrimination, and hatred. Doing so requires determination and confidence that can only be derived from a strong character, which in turn requires a strong body. Swami Vivekananda attached great importance to physical fitness. The purpose of education is to build physically and morally strong men and women.

Swamiji faulted the then-prevalent system of education in India for failing to produce such humans who would be capable of independent judgment and thought, and thus be able to contribute to betterment of the society that they live in. Instead, it put them through a series of ill-conceived academic exercises and examinations resulting in the production of characterless pen-pushers who have no self-esteem and are capable of nothing more than obeying orders from their superiors, who were often foreigners. To rectify this, Vivekananda urged the Indians to look at their own glorious past to draw inspirations from and bring about the necessary changes. He saw many positives in the Western civilizations' system of education, especially the one in America. He saw it as one where a person was judged only by his character and intentions, not by his caste or wealth. He advised his fellow countrymen to adopt that attitude. However, at the same time, he reminded his compatriots to be motivated by the East's traditional goal of spiritual elevation through selfless service instead of the self-centered craving for material comfort espoused in the West.

Swami Vivekananda placed a great deal of emphasis on the teaching of religion. However, following the inclusive philosophy of his "guru" (teacher) Shri Ramakrishna Paramahansa Dev, he welcomed people of all religions to live side-by-side with love and respect for each other. According to him, any religion can serve as the vehicle to carry its practitioner to the supreme state where he sees himself in all beings. However, one cannot reach that state without a vehicle and a qualified unselfish teacher to show the way. The disciple needs to adopt the path of renunciation and selfless service, which is India's ancient national ideal. His surrender to his teacher must be total and absolutely unquestioning. The

selflessness will ensure protection against the rise of fanaticism.

A good teacher is a must for proper mentoring of a good disciple. The teacher must be pure and teach by example, rather than by words. He must not expect money, fame, or any other worldly reward in exchange of his service. Indeed, a good teacher must offer to all qualified seekers of knowledge not only his tutelage entirely free of cost, but also room and board, if need be. It is the society's responsibility to ensure that the teacher has the resources to do so. A good teacher must always embody noble thoughts and actions, never giving in to any of the six sins—lust, anger, greed, attachment, egotism, and jealousy. He must be tolerant and forgiving. Shri Ramakrishna Paramahansa Dev is an ideal example of such a teacher.

In ancient Indian tradition, the relationship between a teacher and his disciple is among the most sacred. It is based only on mutual respect, trust, and joint pursuit of knowledge, completely free of selfish interests. This relationship must commence as early as possible and continue until the disciple is ready to move on to the next stage. The teacher must recognize the inherent leaning of each disciple and help the latter realize his potential accordingly, rather than trying to force them into molds of his own choice. The teacher must see himself only as a facilitator, not a director, in the development of his disciple.

Ever so respectful toward all women, Swamiji spoke and worked tirelessly to promote education of the womenfolk of India, facing much opposition from the morbid society of the time. He was greatly impressed by many of the women he had met in America. He heaped praise on their noble characters, moral strength, sharp intellect, and equal role as their menfolk both at home and in the larger society. Swamiji noted, astutely, that a home where the women are happy is most likely to succeed in producing children who will grow up to be ideal citizens. By depriving its women of education, a nation will only stifle its own development. While encouraging his compatriots to learn from the

treatment of women in America, especially affording them education, Swamiji also insisted that the Indian woman needs to look no farther than Sita for her ideal. Finally, he cautions against men trying to exercise too much control over women's education. Men's role should be limited to encouraging their womenfolk to seek education, and providing a conducive social environment. They should leave it to the women to be teachers of other women. Indeed, Swamiji believed in strict separation of sexes at schools.

Swamiji ends his discourse with some comments on public education. Here he emphatically states the dire need for a burst of unbridled energy to take over and mobilize the masses. The only way for the vast population of poor, who have been oppressed and exploited endlessly by a handful of rich by means of a perverted system based on castes and superstitions, to rid itself of its woes is to be educated. This education has to be initiated by a selfless few like Swamiji himself, starting with professing from door to door, until it achieves the critical momentum to sustain itself. A nation cannot develop without the education of its masses. It is education that will instill in the members of the productive working class the confidence that they need to be efficient.

Throughout, Vivekananda maintains the need for reinventing the ancient Indian system of education instead of adopting the western ways as the prevalent system was trying to do. He argued that the time-tested Indian system was superior on its moral ground and particularly better suited to the norms and values that are deeply rooted in the Indians and superior to their western counterparts anyway. Even though there is room for debate on the underlying theory, much of the practices that Swami Vivekananda proposes transcend their time and place, and remain valid in today's global context. The challenge lies, of course, in finding a way to mobilize such an effort on a worldwide basis within the framework of the modern global economy. It is possible in theory, if all nations, or at least the most powerful ones, commit their resources to end global suffering. There is no dearth of such intentions and undertakings on paper, but success has been slow in coming. It is no easy task since in the poorest parts of the world there is a strong organized resistance against the spread of education by small but powerful groups who stand to lose their grip on power if it succeeds. Still, the leaders of the ongoing efforts to educate the world's poor and oppressed will do well to consider the spirit behind Swamiji's thoughts even if it may not be possible to adopt all the approaches and measures exactly as he has suggested.

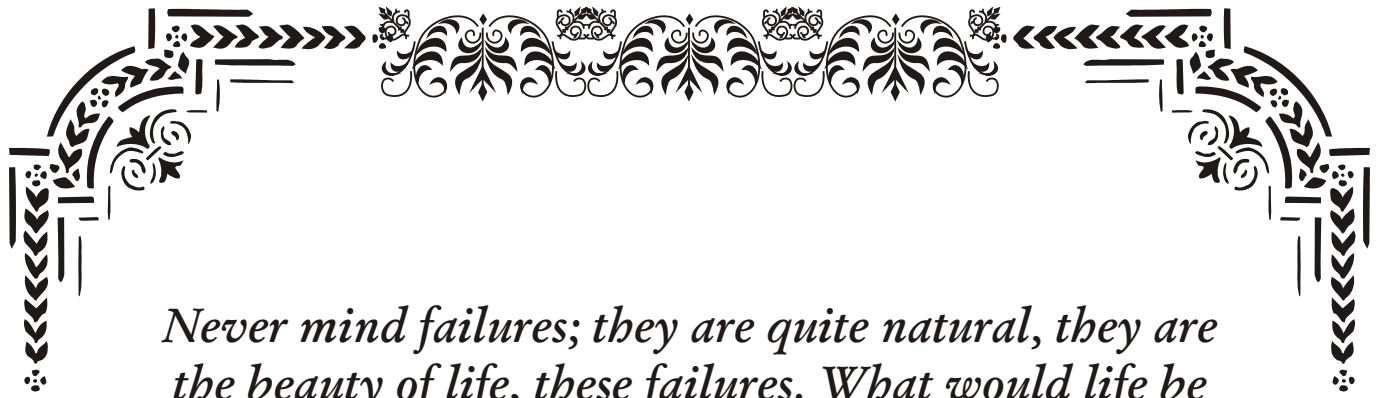


"I see in him the heir to the spiritual discoveries and religious struggles of innumerable teachers and saints in the past of India and the world, and at the same time the pioneer and prophet of a new and future order of development...I believe that each trace of those higher and uncommon modes of thought and consciousness to which he held the key, has its significance for the modern age."

— Sister Nivedita

With Best Wishes from

Tejen and Sunanda Bose



Never mind failures; they are quite natural, they are the beauty of life, these failures. What would life be without them? It would not be worth having if it were not for struggles. Where would be the poetry of life? Never mind the struggles, the mistakes. I never heard a cow tell a lie, but it is only a cow—never a man. So never mind these failures, these little backslidings; hold the ideal a thousand times, and if you fail a thousand times, make the attempt once more.

With Best Wishes from

**Modern Laboratories :
Sreeti and Prasanta Ghose
And
Family**



Sisters and Brothers of America

Kalyan Mitra

“Sisters and Brothers of America” were the first five words with which Swami Vivekananda began his historic oration at the opening session of the Parliament of Religions on September 11, 1893 at what is now the Art Institute of Chicago. It met with a deafening applause from the audience. There was no explanation except that he spoke with divine spontaneity, dedication and conviction of what was to follow. Swamiji then said, “It fills my heart with joy unspeakable to rise in response to the warm and cordial welcome. I thank you in the name of the most ancient order of monks in the world. I thank you in the name of millions and millions of Hindu people of all classes and sects. I am proud to belong to a religion which has taught the world both tolerance and universal acceptance.” Swamiji quoted the Bhagavad Gita (4.11), “whosoever comes to Me through whatsoever form I reach him.” Swamiji went on to say “I fervently hope that the bell that tolled this morning in honor of this convention may be the death knell of all fanaticism.”

The organizers of the Parliament, in order to keep the audience from dissipating, would make impromptu announcements that Swamiji would speak at the end of the day and the crowd waited.

Swamiji addressed the gathering in the Upanishadic way as Children of immortal bliss...”yea the Hindu refuses to call you sinners! Ye are the Children of God, the sharers of immortal bliss, holy and perfect beings. Ye divinities on earth- sinners! It is a sin to call a man so; it is a standing libel on human nature.”

Swamiji addressed the concluding session thus, “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 and point out to him that upon the banner of every religion will soon be written in spite of resistance. 'Help and not Fight Assimilation and not Destruction, Harmony and Peace and not Dissension.'”

During the Parliament, an incident took place. Swamiji was staying with the family of Mr. J.B. Lyon, a prominent attorney of Chicago, who was a temperamental person. His wife, Emily, was very worried how he would react to the Indian guest and she had intended to shift Swamiji to another apartment the next morning. When Mr. Lyon met Swamiji in the library before breakfast, she was on tenterhooks. However, Mr. Lyon came out of the library and told his wife, “Emily, he is a most remarkable man that I have ever met, and he shall stay here as long as he wishes, and I do not care if all the other guests leave.” This same reaction was felt by the audience during the Parliament of Religions.

The New York Herald proclaimed, “He is undoubtedly the greatest figure in the Parliament of Religions. After hearing him, we feel how foolish it is to send missionaries to the learned nation.” Dr. Annie Besant remarked “Enraptured, the huge multitude hung upon his words; not a syllable must be lost, not a cadence missed! “That man a heathen?” said one as he came out of the hall “and we send missionaries to his people! It would it be more fitting that they should send missionaries to us.” After Swamiji's speeches the donations for sending missionaries to India dropped substantially.

This historic speech was the culmination of Swami Vivekananda's quest for knowledge found through his guru Sri Ramakrishna and his enlightenment found through his travels around his own country.

Swamiji believed each soul is potentially divine. The goal is to manifest this Divinity within by

controlling nature, external and internal. This could be achieved either by work, or worship, or gaining control of one's mind, or philosophy. This is the whole religion. Doctrines or dogmas, or rituals, or books, or temples, or forms, are but secondary details. Swamiji exemplified the Atman in man as 'being', the only Truth, the Eternal, and the transient changeful world as 'becoming', which together with 'being' constitutes total reality; the changeful and the eternal. Becoming, apart from 'being' is zero.

He believed in work and action and said "So work, save Vedanta, putting God in everything, and knowing him to be in everything. Work incessantly, holding life as something deified, as god Himself. God is in everything, where else shall we go to find Him? He is already in every work, in every thought, in every feeling. Thus knowing, we must work, His is the only way- there is no other."

Swami Vivekananda toured India mainly on foot as a penniless monk. He carried only a staff, a water pot, and his two favorite books, the Bhagavad Gita and the Imitation of Christ by Thomas a. Kempis. He first travelled to Varanasi where he visited the Durga Temple. There some monkeys attacked him. Vivekananda was intending to run away when a monk shouted out to him, "Face the brutes," and so he stood his ground boldly and the monkeys ran away. In the course of his journey, he felt once that he wanted a smoke. He asked a poor peasant for a puff at his hookah! The peasant was taken aback and said that he was of a low-caste, but Swamiji said that they were both children of God and both had the same Atman, and without any hesitation, he comfortably puffed at the man's hookah before proceeding on his way. He said on another occasion, "May I be born again and again, and suffer thousands of miseries so that I should worship the only God that exists, the only God I believe in, the sum total of all souls, and above all, my God the wicked, my God the miserable, my God the poor of all races, of all species, is the special object of my worship." He had also recalled Sri Ramakrishna's saying, 'Religion is not for an empty stomach.'

In February 1891, Vivekananda arrived at Alwar in Rajputana and met the maharaja, Mangul Singh, who had no faith in worship of images, and Swamiji could not convince him of the use of images as symbols of

God. Swamiji then asked the prime minister of the state, who was present, to take down a portrait of the Maharaja, which was hanging on the wall, and to spit on it. The prime minister and those who were present were horrified, though Swamiji pointed out that it was only a portrait on canvas, and not the Maharaja, himself! It was thus that Swamiji could make the Maharaja and the ministers realize that though the portrait was not the Maharaja but was a symbol and a representation of the Maharaja and hence revered.

While staying as a guest of the Raja of Khettri, he was invited to attend a musical performance by a dancing girl. Swamiji declined because he felt it was not proper for a monk to attend the function. Then, the dancing girls' soulful singing reached his ears. She sang that the wise and chaste should look upon all in the same manner and she appealed to him in her song to uplift her. Swamiji was so moved and touched; he realized that the same Atman was in all and he should not have looked down at the dancing girl. He then attended the function and blessed the girl.

While meditating in the Himalayas, Vivekananda had the realization that the microcosm and the macrocosm (the individual soul in a man and the universal soul in nature and the universe), worked in the same way of creation, maintenance, and dissolution.

While meditating in Kanyakumari at the southernmost tip of India, Swamiji had a vision of his Master, Sri Ramakrishna, going westward over the waves of the ocean, and beckoning him to follow. Swamiji then wrote to Swami Saradananda to seek the directions of the Holy Mother, Saradadevi, and when she confirmed and blessed him to go, Swamiji was overjoyed and prepared, immediately, to proceed to America with funds from the Raja of Khettri and other disciples, and thus participate at the historic Parliament of Religions.

Eleanor Stark, author of the 'Gift Unopened' wrote "Columbus discovered the soil of America, Vivekananda discovered the soul of America." Swamii Vivekananda's historic speech at the 1893 World Parliament of Religions changed the face of Hinduism in the west and held up an ancient faith as a beacon of light and universal brotherhood.

Swami Vivekananda and Women Upliftment

Ramanuj Bhattacharya

Swami Vivekananda was a realized soul and had unquestionable authority on the Truths of Vedanta and spirituality. However, he also spent considerable time on social and cultural problems including women upliftment and empowerment as part of his overall mission. Some feel that Swamiji was against widow remarriage concept championed by another great son of India, Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar (1820–1891). However, that is not true. In order to understand Swamiji's thoughts on social matters after 120 years, it is important to understand his contemporary time - social structure, religious beliefs and customs. In this article, I take the opportunity to present some historical context not only to delineate Swamiji's view on widow marriage but also his strategic vision and forward thinking in general on improving the situation of women in India.

In the Hindu society of the nineteenth century, social reformers were busy with three critical and sensitive problems related to Hindu marriages - early marriage, multiple marriages (polygamy) and widow marriage. Lots of contentious discussions, protests and movements took place throughout India around these three issues during that century. It is needless to say that the issues were interrelated.

Vidyasagar wanted to transform India and not just change it. He worked on various social reforms tirelessly for many years spreading talks of reforms everywhere in India. He was a true nationalist reformer with a huge heart full of compassion and is a builder of modern India. He came to national limelight as the champion of the “widow remarriage” concept which was a bold one in the prevailing social environment (even before Swamiji was born). Vidyasagar's epochal “Widow Remarriage” literary work gave shape to a historic national movement on the issue. In 1956, “Hindu Widows' Remarriage Act”

was enacted mainly because of his uncompromising, courageous and galvanizing leadership amidst significant protests and negativity. Although the movement brought fresh breadth of air to many closed minds, the law had several gaps and didn't provide minimum deterrent for polygamy or someone to take other unfair advantages. Only 300 widow marriages took place by 1900, in a span of 44 years (Data provided by Ranade). Most widow marriages in Bengal took place under the direct influence of Vidyasagar and his monetary support. It is very sad to say that most of the people who came forward to marry widows were motivated either by money or another wife while being recognized as heroes. Vidyasagar was devastated to meet the demands of these money hungry people. The movement had lost its momentum, at least in Bengal, even before Vidyasagar's death in 1891.

Vidyasagar was a great ideal of Swamiji not just as a great social reformer, but also as a great ideal character. Swamiji once said, “After Ramakrishna, I follow Vidyasagar.” Swamiji saw his sacrifice, love and struggle for people and women in particular. Swamiji openly said, “There is not a man of my age in Northern India, on whom his shadow has not fallen.” He also added, “What a tremendous joy I feel when I think of these two men - Ram Mohan and Vidyasagar - and Shri Ramakrishna and they were born just a few miles apart.” Vivekananda would have never placed any other name next to his Guru unless the person was worthy of it in Swamiji's mind. Sister Nivedita wrote that Swami Vivekananda considered Vidyasagar as the “hero of widow remarriage, and the abolition of polygamy”.

Let's first consider briefly if Swamiji was qualified to express meaningful observations and advance his thoughts on marriage. Although a monk, he had few

unique advantages. First, he was the first interpreter of religion and spirituality in the modern light and asked people to break down all the hatred, dogmas and fanaticism in the name of religion. Second, Swamiji saw the sad state and plights of women all over India first hand during his wandering days. As he was a monk, women came to meet him even from conservative societies and were more open to sharing their sufferings with him. As a result, he came very close to the true condition of women in India probably more than anybody else of his time. Third, he saw the divine mother in women and only wanted to do good to them without any self-interest. Fourth, his intellect, rational thinking and exposure to the West put him in a great position to uphold his views on women when they couldn't do anything more than crying silently.

When Swamiji was wandering through India, Vidyasagar passed away (in 1891). Swamiji had the advantage of knowing the outcome of the great widow marriage movement in modern Indian history. Situation also changed somewhat by then because Vidyasagar had already opened up the Indian minds and made them better prepared to receive new messages and ideas of Swami Vivekananda. Swamiji was progressive enough to support both divorce and widow marriage and was pleased with the fact that at least legally widows could remarry. Many times, he reminded people about India's glorious past when women took great roles in society and had control over their destiny. He wanted to bring back that golden era in India. He knew neither a mere law nor money would encourage Hindu males to overcome in large numbers their centuries of practices and social inhibitions to marry widows. He saw how rogue elements took advantage of the system. Only in rare cases, a few would come forward in the right spirit.

Swamiji thought that the ultimate outcome of the reforms would depend on the order in which they were going to be resolved. He had analyzed the way the customs came into play and tried to resolve the issues in that light. Whether his conclusions were correct or not, only time was to determine. Let's now review both widow marriage and child marriage issues at Swamiji's time in more details.

Widow marriage was a typical problem of the higher class, a smaller percentage the Hindu population. As cited by Swamiji many times, women outnumbered men in upper classes in all countries. He asked who the society should push for marriage in such a situation - a widow or a maiden. According to him, Hindus being believer in equality chose to support maidens with a heavy heart.⁴ Moreover, widow marriage was not a problem among the lower castes that made up the majority. The women of the lower classes worked hard to earn livelihood and died early due to hard work and poor nutrition. So, the number of women in lower classes was lower than that of men forcing men to marry widows.

We also need to keep in mind that not everybody associated with the widow marriage movement in 1890s had Vidyasagar's dedication and his noble qualities. When Swamiji found that many reformers could not think of anything other than marriage and domestic life for women, he clearly stated that widow marriage was not going to solve all the evils. Many widows who remarried were either ill treated or deserted later. Swami Vivekananda knew firsthand how bad a girl could be treated in her in-laws house even during her first marriage. One of his younger sisters committed suicide due to the severely harsh treatment from her mother-in-law which had deeply impacted Swamiji. Also, widow marriage was way more expensive than first marriage as evidenced by Vidyasagar because of even more unreasonable demands from the groom's side. Also, not all widows were treated badly at their parent's house as noted by Mrs. Bull who said that a lot of her friends didn't even know about any torture or misbehavior on widows. However, there was no alternative to widows other than leading an austere life with little social respect. Widows were pathetically trapped between the two hard realities and needed a way out.

Now, let's briefly review the child marriage issue of that time. Child marriage was a curse to the society. Mainly due to Vidyasagar, "Age of Consent Act" was introduced in 1860 and the minimum age for a girl was set at 10 (age limit was non-existent before that). Initially nobody objected to that age limit. In 1872,

Kesab Sen was able to pass Native Marriage Act III for Brahma Samaj with handful members legalizing the marriage age of boys at 18 and girls at 14. Hindus stayed under the purview of the minimum age of 10. In 1889, when there was an attempt to increase the limit from 10 to 12, it led to a huge uproar in India. Largest opposition probably came from Bengal. While the doctors wanted to raise the age limit, the non-doctors also came up with their own points to leave it alone. There were shameless discussions at the upper class level which crossed all limits. Bengali pundits advanced their points with their own ideas about women body and proclaimed that if a girl was not married off before her puberty, the whole religion would go to dogs as the sin was equivalent to killing a human being. They became more worried about the afterlife than present life in the name of religion and completely ignored the fact that early marriage would cause all kinds of physical issues including death for the mother and the child. Finally, the Age of Consent Act in 1891 set the minimum age for a Hindu girl at 12.

Swamiji saw the child marriage debate happening in front of him and had deep hatred for early marriage and the discussions by the religious leaders. The moment he thought that the young girls were being subjected to the passion of elderly men, he felt extreme disgust. While in Mumbai as a wandering monk, when somebody informed him about the protest of the Bengal elite against the age increase, he felt deeply ashamed and attacked such mentality and logic with his characteristic strong language. He used to burst into flames when he talked about early marriage and angrily retorted at the joy of the parents marrying off an eight year old girl to a 30 year old groom. He told Manmatha Babu to stop the marriage of his 9 year old daughter because it was a grave sin. While in the West, Swamiji reminded people that the whole world was spitting on us because of such actions and he was tired of fighting on this issue.

After analyzing both issues, Swamiji came to the conclusion that education was the only way to solve all problems of women leading to their emancipation. He opined, for women problems can be many “ but none that cannot be solved by that magic word

'education'”. He wanted to provide “education by which character is formed, strength of mind is increased, intellect is expanded, and by which one can stand on one's own feet”. For that purpose, Swamiji wanted people to spend their energy against child marriage and for women education to solve all the related issues at once. He thought that if girls could marry at a later age, they would automatically develop their own individuality, be educated, economically independent and be able to choose a healthy and a strong person as their life partner if they wanted to. Thus, if early marriage could be stopped, then the number of widows would decrease dramatically making widow marriage issue less severe. Looking back, this was a more thoughtful and practical approach at that time. He also always said that early marriage gave rise to a nation with weak health. As an example, he compared the physical strength of the European nations with that of India. He also noted that races like Gurkha, Punjabi, Jath etc. in India were still very strong physically because they didn't have early marriage. Moreover, Swamiji supported intermarriage to increase the strength of the nation because marrying within a fixed group had a weakening effect due to lack of variety. Thus, Swamiji decided to focus more heavily on eliminating child marriage and educating women. In his view, educated women would inculcate virtues and values amongst the children and thus prepare the new generation of people who would be able to differentiate themselves by virtues and values. In order to generate the momentum, he asked Sister Nivedita to start a school and had Holy Mother herself bless the school. This one lamp of knowledge helped to light up hundreds of thousands of new lamps in India.

We can see today how practical Swamiji was in his approach and what a strategic thinker he was. The education agenda he chose for the 19th century is now the development agenda for the 21st century in India. With time India has advanced significantly, but the stigma around widow remarriage is still there to some extent because of centuries of social restrictions. It would have been a much tougher problem to face the widow marriage issue head on at that time. Swamiji

turned the problem upside down by changing his focus. With emphasis on education, the women in India today have started to become economically independent and make their own decisions. They have started to compete with men on equal footings in every field and also have achieved better results in many instances. We sincerely hope that widow remarriage becomes fully acceptable in the Indian society not before long.

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May I be born again and again and suffer thousands of miseries, so that I may worship the only God that exists, the only God that I believe in - the sum total of all souls; and above all, my God the wicked, my God the miserable, my God the poor of all races, of all species, is the special object of my worship.

With Best Wishes from

Shikha & Alok Chakrabarti

Ever Relevant Teachings of Swami Vivekananda

Mithilesh Mishra

University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

What Buddha taught to his chief disciples, what Jesus Christ taught to his twelve disciples, what Krishna taught to Arjuna, and what Shri Ramakrishna taught to Naren and other monastic disciples, Swami Vivekananda dedicated his life to teach and share them with the entire humanity as his “Man-making mission”. In fact, his vision and voice continues to inspire the successive generations of all countries and cultures to “Arise, awake, and stop not, till the goal is reached”. As he himself declared,

“Man-making is my mission of life. You try to translate this mission of mine into action and reality. My ideal indeed can be put into a few words, and that is: to preach unto mankind their divinity, and how to make it manifest in every movement of life. ... Let man remember his true nature - divinity. Let it become a living realization and everything else will follow - power, strength, manhood. He will again become a Man.”

The history of humanity has been full of natural and man-made disasters and tragedies - wars, conquests, colonialism, fascism, genocides, holocaust, internecine religious feuds and bloodsheds in the name of God and religion. Yet, we rightly feel a sense of progress through all these because the divinity inherent in man has been seeking to become manifest gradually but perpetually. The two most visible manifestations of the inherent divinity of man are our compassion for others and an ability to sacrifice one's petty interests, even our lives, to serve a noble cause. In modern times, in our lives today, if the forces of materialism seem to muffle our voice of conscience, let's take heart by Swamiji's reminder:

“Today man requires one more adjustment on the spiritual plane; today when material ideas are at the height of their glory and power, today when man is likely to forget his divine nature, through his growing dependence on matter, and is likely to be reduced to a mere money-making machine, an adjustment is

necessary. The voice has spoken, and the power is coming to drive away the clouds of gathering materialism. The power has been set in motion, which at no distant date, will bring unto mankind once more the memory of its real nature.”

It would be prudent to remember here that Swamiji was perfectly aware of man's need of basic necessities of life, man's relative dependence on matter. It was this fact of life which he so inimitably declared, “it is sin to talk about God to a hungry man”. He had come to America to seek material help for the suffering poor of India and in return he was going to share with the West the spiritual treasures of India (which he called 'the perfect exchange'). What Swamiji seemed to be very concerned about was man's forgetfulness of his real divinity due to his excessive materialistic impulses. It would be interesting to note here that the popular Hindi-Urdu word 'ghapla' meaning confusion, in Islam, originally meant (in Arabic) forgetfulness of God. It would also be perhaps equally interesting to note that at the end of the Bhagavad Gita, when Arjuna decided to fight the Mahabharata war (after his initial reluctance and seemingly convincing rationale for his decision to abstain), he declared that he had regained his memory and would do whatever Krishna would ask him to do. Spiritual giants like Swami Vivekananda seem to come to teach, but essentially, their mission is to serve as an eternal reminder of our own innate divinity. The outer human form is the visible connection, realizing our own divinity would join us (yoga) to Swamiji, to our own Ishta or to any other personal or impersonal aspect of Godhead we may be rooted in.

Swamiji also talked about regaining the knowledge of our true nature as regaining our lost empire:

“ .. You cannot get anything which is not yours already. You are indebted to nobody in this universe. .. you need not weep at all. You need not go through all these ceremonies, and need not take any notice of how

to regain your empire, because you never lost it. ..If you think you are free, free you are this moment, and if you think you are bound, bound you will be. .. It may frighten you now, but when you think over it, and realize it in your own life, then you will come to know that what I say is true.”

The second most important message of Swamiji for us and for the later generations pertains to his ideas and ideals for education. As he boldly declared,

“ Education is the manifestation of the perfection already in man. .. No one was ever really taught by another. Each of us has to teach himself. The external teacher offers only the suggestion which rouses the internal teacher to work, to understand things. ... 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 you have assimilated five ideas and made them your life and character, you have more education than any man who got by heart a whole library. If education were identical with information, the libraries would be the greatest sages in the world and encyclopedias the rishis.”

We should not find it surprising that Swamiji was quiet disappointed, like his guru, Shri Ramakrishna, about the state of affairs obtaining in the schools, colleges, and universities of his times:

“Education has yet to be in the world, and civilization - civilization has begun nowhere yet.”

It would indeed be necessary for us to revitalize our educational and civilization goals and aspirations in the context of Swamiji's somber message.

Just as Swamiji's message and exhortations regarding the realization of our innate divinity was a direct blow to the understanding and practice of equating spiritual practices and disciplines merely to image worship, his reinvigoration of the original idea behind the theory of Karma dealt a severe blow to the custodians of society bent upon keeping the masses weak, disempowered, and subjugated forever. Swamiji's bold pronouncements (which were in consonance with his own Guru and every well-known

saint and mystic before him) on the workings of Karma indeed was the guiding light for the downtrodden masses of India and the world to change their destinies with their own two hands and wait for help no more. To quote Swamiji,

“Know that you are the creator of your own destiny. ...Men in general lay all blame of life on their fellow-me, or failing that, on God, or they conjure up a ghost, and say it is fate. Where is fate, and who is fate? We reap what we sow. We are the makers of our own fate. None else has the blame, none has the praise.”

Swamiji did not want any potential detractor to suggest later on that his interpretation of Karma does not leave any room for divine grace to be operating in human destiny. He succinctly cleared up any such doubt when he said,

“His infinite mercy is open to everyone, at all times, in all places, under all conditions, unflinching, unswerving. Upon us depends how we must use it. Upon us depends how we utilize it. ... Therefore, stand up, be bold, be strong. Take the whole responsibility on your own shoulders, and know that you are the creator of your own destiny and all the strength and succor you want is within yourself.”

The fact that we are celebrating the 150th birth anniversary of Swami Vivekananda in all continents of the world should reassure us that Swamiji's message was then, still is, and will forever remain relevant and inspiring to humanity. Swamiji himself has said that this message will guide us for “at least 1500 years!”

I conclude my article with very humble salutations to Swamiji. His guru, Shri Ramakrishna wanted Naren (later Swami Vivekananda) to teach, and he fulfilled his Guru's command with utmost dedication and without sparing himself in the least. With the passage of time, the modern (especially the post-modern) man may be tempted to dismiss Shri Ramakrishna as some larger than human imagination of a bunch of Calcutta Bengalis, but as long the multivolume Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda remain with us, no human doubt or perversity will succeed in making us live by bread alone.

Swamiji

Shyamal Bose

On January 12th 1863, was born one of Bengal's brightest son, in the form of Narendranath, who is better known to us as Swami Vivekananda. He was born in the Datta family of Sri Vishwanath and Srimati Bhuvashwaridevi. Interestingly his paternal grandfather, Sri Durgacharan Datta, had renounced his earthly life, in search of Brahman (God).

Great men are born great. Narendranath was no different. He always questioned everything to find the rationality before accepting it, on face value. He excelled in his School and College years because of his inborn abilities and his own urge to excel. However he was always respectful of others. From a very young age he wanted to know about the Supreme being. He always wanted to know if anybody had seen God.

In 1881 one of his English Professor in Bangalore suggested he see Sri Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa Deva, as he was comfortable with all aspects of Hinduism, being at ease with the Advaita Vedanta, and he was even an ardent devotee of Mother Goddess Kali Thakur.

Ramakrishna Deva initially did not impress Narendranath. But seeing his potential, Thakur Ramakrishna persisted. Finally, one day Narendranath asked Thakur Ramakrishna if he had seen God? Thakur responded by saying, "I see him as clearly as I see you, if not even clearer." In fact, in one of the later visits he showed, Naren, Mother Goddess Kali Thakur.

Swami Vivekananda was very fond of his own mother, who was a very pious lady. Later he said that our mother in the house is the God in our family. The love and affection of the mother is never duplicate able. Swami Vivekananda always confessed, whatever he learnt and knows, was from his Master Sri Sri

Ramakrishna Thakur. He and Naren were all encompassing. They preached that there is only one God, people call Him by various names. Swamiji learnt from His Master that we are like the bee. The bee drones while looking for the honey. But when it tastes the honey, it ceases to do so. So it is with us. We all proclaim our God to be supreme. When we realize God within us, we realize that The Almighty God is the only one. It is like having a Hindu in one ghat, a Muslim at another ghat and a Christian in the third ghat. The Hindu says he is drinking "Jal", the Muslim says he is drinking "Pani" and the Christian says he is drinking "Water". But all three are drinking the same, only they are calling it differently.

Swamiji condemned no one, but saw God in all, as did Ramakrishna Deva. His whole life was spent in breaking down barriers of sectarianism and dogma. He advocated and strove to establish absolute freedom of thought. They were the pillars of the light in the oceans of the world, to quote one of his biographers. Do not care for doctrines, do not care for dogma, or churches or temples. The essence of existence is spirituality. If you offer yourselves to God, whatever the religion, The God, The Brahman, He will receive you with his open arms. Swamiji emphasized that the Hindus are introspective people. When we Hindus ask ourselves, who is responsible for our failings, we find we are the responsible one.

After the "Maha Samadhi" of Sri Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa Deva in 1886, Naren took the name of Swami Vivekananda by himself and so did the other disciples of Sri Sri Ramakrishna Deva. For the next twelve or more years the brother monks often lived on only rice and salt, the alms offered to them. However, years later their faith and hard work paid off as donations came pouring after Swamiji's western

**ghat a series of steps of stone or concrete leading down to a body of water, often a holy river.*

trips and rousing welcome back to India. This finally led to the formation of the Belur Math and Mission and the recent initiation of the Vivekananda University at Belur.

In 1893 Swamiji came to our city of Chicago, at the Parliament of Religions at where the Art Institute is now. After his famous opening speech "Brothers and Sisters of America", he turned out to be the main speaker for whom people sat for hours to hear his spontaneous and impromptu deliveries that came from his soul. His new found popularity took him back to Boston, New York City and elsewhere. He gave a session at the Waldorf Astoria, where US Presidents sojourn. His audiences included noble laureates and the elite of the society and other intellectuals.

Prior to that, the western world was not much exposed to Hinduism, outside of some people of stature, such as Ralph Emerson, Walt Whitman, Henry David Thoreau, Goethe, Wordsworth and the Poet Laureate of England Lord Tennyson. The Chicago Herald newspaper proclaimed that Swamiji stole the show at the Parliament of Religions. So did the New York Times and several Boston newspapers.

Just as a note of interest, Swamiji received as much as dollar nine hundred and even as high as twenty-seven hundred per lecture. Swamiji was always appreciative of the American people for their philanthropic spirits and generosity.

Swamiji took his last breath at the age of 39 years from complications of Diabetes mellitus on July 4th, 1902. But his legacy remains to this day, as we celebrate his hundred and fiftieth birthday. His oratory still prevails as he inspires us with the words: "Faith in ourselves and faith in God, is the secret of greatness. Or that God within, resides in all things. And that purity and perfections are ingrained in our souls, never to die. Or that we are the Atman, the body is just a covering".

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If a piece of burning charcoal be placed on a man's head, see how he struggles to throw it off. Similar will be the struggle for freedom of those who really understand that they are slaves of nature.

With Best Wishes from

Anant and Sarmistha Bardhan & Family



The world requires a few hundred bold men and women. Practice that boldness which dares know the Truth, which dares show the Truth in life, which does not quake before death, nay, welcomes death, makes a man know that he is the Spirit, that in the whole universe, nothing can kill him. Then you will be free.

With Best Wishes from

Anup and Indrani Banerjee & Family

The world is ready to give up its secrets if we only know how to knock, how to give it the necessary blow. The strength and force of the blow come through concentration.

With Best Wishes from

Asok, Subhra, Piyali and Rajat Gangopadhyay



Every individual is a center for the manifestation of a certain force. This force has been stored up as the resultant of our previous works, and each one of us is born with this force at our back.

With Best Wishes from

Asim and Alpana Gangopadhyaya & Family

*Always discriminate between the real and
unreal, and devote yourself heart and soul to
the attempt to realise the Atman.*

With Best Wishes from

Asish, Sampa and Archit Ghosh



*Religion is not in doctrines, in dogmas, nor in
intellectual argumentation; it is being and
becoming; it is realization.*

With Best Wishes from

Bikash, Rina, Simron and Sharon Dhali

*Those who do not live for others are more dead
than alive.*

With Best Wishes from

Chittarupa and Amitava Ghosh & Family



*You have to grow from the inside out. None can teach
you, none can make you spiritual. There is no other
teacher but your own soul.*

With Best Wishes from

Devlina Law and Akash Sen

All the powers in the universe are already ours. It is we who have put our hands before our eyes, and cry that it is dark. Know that there is no darkness around us. Take hands away and there is light which was from the beginning. Darkness never existed, weakness never existed.

With Best Wishes from

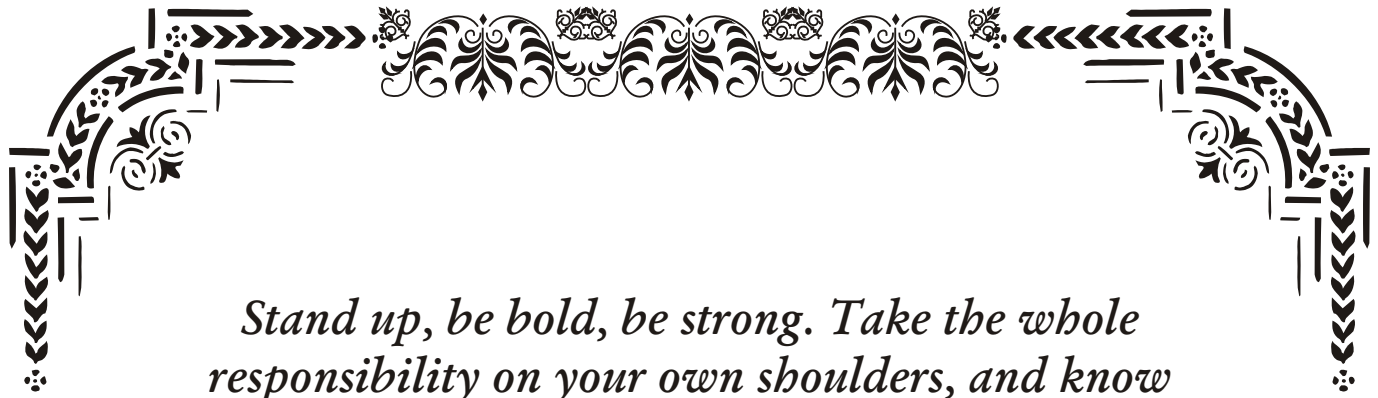
Arjun and Indrani Dutta



What the world wants is character. The world is in need of those whose life is one burning love, selfless. That love will make every word tell like a thunderbolt.

With Best Wishes from

Manatosh and Basanti Banerji & Family



Stand up, be bold, be strong. Take the whole responsibility on your own shoulders, and know that you are the creator of your own destiny. All the strength and succor you want is within yourself. Therefore make your own future.

With Best Wishes from

**Sridhar and Mita Adhya
And
Family**



Anything that is secret and mysterious in these systems of yoga should be at once rejected. The best guide in life is strength. In religion, as in all other matters, discard everything that weakens you, have nothing to do with it.

With Best Wishes from

Palit Family



Purity, patience and perseverance are the three essentials to success, and above all: love

With Best Wishes from

Pallab and Lipika Midya & Family

Never think there is anything impossible for the soul. It is the greatest heresy to think so. If there is sin, this is the only sin — to say that you are weak, or others are weak.

With Best Wishes from

Rahul and Sanchita Dev & Family



If you think that you are bound, you remain bound; you make your own bondage. If you know that you are free, you are free this moment. This is knowledge, knowledge of freedom. Freedom is the goal of all nature.

With Best Wishes from

Sanjit and Rina Ray & Family

The universe is – objectified God.

With Best Wishes from

Sumit and Archana Ray & Family



*Truth can be stated in a thousand different ways,
yet each one can be true.*

With Best Wishes from

Tarak and Amita Paul & Family

My Vivekananda

Indrani Mondal



Calendar pictures and statues, of every size
 of the saffron robe monk with piercing eyes,
 like every Bengal child I was born into Vivekananda,
 the brilliant Bengal son/sun that dazzled Chicago!
 His power of vision and faith in mankind
 rocked the Parliament of Religions with awe and delight,
 as his western “Brothers and Sisters” jumped to their feet
 responding to his call, forgetting differences in creed!

“A true Hero!” my Baba said always, with joy and pride
 “Real son of the soil!” said my Ma, wiping her eyes!
 My Vivekananda is what I felt at his Rock Memorial,
 as oceans thundered around it, echoing the cry of a lonely gull!
 Greatness is not easy to bear or survive,
 but there are some, who cannot live otherwise,
 bring what it may blame or fame
 their mission inspires and gives life new aim,
 to “Arise ,Awake” and never give up any fight
 as long as one's dreams have conviction's light,
 pursue the uphill climb hard as it seems
 joy is in the journey of keeping alive one's dreams.
 I think that's what Vivekananda's favorite saying really meant
 “Charaibati “(Chalte Raho) forever and life's well spent!



Hold on Yet A While, Brave Heart

If the sun by the cloud is hidden a bit,
If the welkin shows but gloom,
Still hold on yet a while, brave heart,
The victory is sure to come.

No winter was but summer came behind,
Each hollow crests the wave,
They push each other in light and shade;
Be steady then and brave.

The duties of life are sore indeed,
And its pleasures fleeting, vain,
The goal so shadowy seems and dim,
Yet plod on through the dark, brave heart,
With all thy might and main.

Not a work will be lost, no struggle vain,
Though hopes be blighted, powers gone;
Of thy loins shall come the heirs to all,
Then hold on yet a while, brave soul,
No good is e'er undone.

Though the good and the wise in life are few,
Yet theirs are the reins to lead,
The masses know but late the worth;
Heed none and gently guide.

With thee are those who see afar,
With thee is the Lord of might,
All blessings pour on thee, great soul,
To thee may all come right!

— Swami Vivekananda

“ It may be that I shall find it good to get outside my body, to cast it off like a worn out garment. But I shall not cease to work. I shall inspire men everywhere until the whole world shall know that it is one with God.”

— Swami Vivekananda

With compliments of :



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