

Swami Vivekananda's Blessed *Punya Bhumi*

Salutation to the [En]lightening Vivek[ananda], whose descent was to bring [spiritual] revolution [in the world]—

क्रान्तिकार्यावतीर्णाय नमो विवेकविद्युते । ।

It is proper to invoke the spiritual presence of Swami Vivekananda who took the world by storm with his inspiring utterances, on the blessed occasion of his 150th birth anniversary. The wisdom and spirit that shone through his personality can rekindle the dormant fire in us, guiding us to rebuild India in tune with her heritage, undying tradition and spiritual genius. Jawaharlal Nehru said, "...Swami Vivekananda gave us something which brings us a certain pride in our inheritance... Directly or indirectly, he has powerfully influenced the India of today. And I think that our younger generation will take advantage of this fountain of wisdom, spirit and fire that flows through him."

Among the saints and patriots of India who have left for us a legacy rich in spiritual values and ideas on right living, the personality of Swamiji stands out. For the first time, he broke away from the tradition of world-retiring renunciation and the image of the reclusive monk. He carried the message of India to the world outside. He was an evangelist and world prophet.

India of today and Swamiji are inextricably bound together. We cannot think of one without the other. His contributions have been diverse and have touched almost all the aspects of national resurgence—political, social, educational, cultural and spiritual. Almost every institution born during this century bears

the impression of his forceful message and every positive movement has drawn inspiration from this great saint. He is lovingly described as the 'patriot-saint' of India because his love for his motherland was intense and unparalleled.

He said in a speech at Colombo, "If there is any land on this earth that can lay claim to be the blessed *Punya Bhumi*, to be the land to which all souls on this earth must come to account for *karma*, the land to which every soul that is wending its way Godward must come to attain its last home, the land where humanity has attained its highest towards gentleness, towards generosity, towards purity, towards calmness, above all the land of introspection and spirituality—it is India."

What was his plan for India? First, he instilled and nurtured in us a burning love for India and taught us to be proud of our glorious inheritance. He infused in us a sense of faith in India's future and a spirit of self-confidence and self-respect. He wanted us to believe that India had not only a great past but she is also destined to play a greater and brighter role in the future of humanity. Although he was deeply rooted in the past, drawing all his inspiration from the ancient wisdom of our sages, he was modern in his approach to life's problems and was like a bridge between India's past and her present.

He had walked the length and breadth of India as a wandering monk. During that period, he came to know *real* India intimately. He saw on the one hand 'rank materialism', and on the other, 'arrant superstition' ruling the minds of people. An

utter disregard for the precious inheritance that India had received from the past was fast growing; and blind imitation of the glamorous civilization of the West, its manners and customs, was reducing our nation into a mere non-entity. His heart bled at what he saw. His inspiring call roused the nation from a deep slumber and made her stand on her feet once again with fresh vigour and enthusiasm. This was his very first task: to arouse in the people a national consciousness, a respect for India's past greatness, her spiritual tradition and an unshakable faith in her future.

The writings and lectures of Swamiji have contributed a great deal to the strengthening of the moral foundations of Indian nationalism, both in theory and practice. At a time when India was seized with apathy and despair, he thundered the gospel of patriotism and urged people to be strong and united. Urging them to do away even with narrow nationalism, he reminded them of the need to place and judge all problems with an international perspective. He exhorted Indians to work for education, uplift of the masses and national integration. His call to the people was to help others and to have faith in their own goodness. According to Swamiji, understanding, cherishing, practising and teaching the life-giving values of our religion and culture constitute patriotism. Since religion and culture form the very soul of India and form the life blood of the nation, the greatest good that we can do is to adhere to the universal principles of true religion, practise and propagate them.

Swamiji always reminded us that the Hindu religion is the most rational and scientific, and recognizes the divinity in every being, the unity and oneness of God, and the harmony of all religions. Swamiji

believed that preservation and advancement of the universal principles of spirituality must be our national policy, for in it lies India's real greatness and also because the world thirsting for this, looks to India to show the way. The only means of a vigorous national life, in his view, was to intensify the national consciousness along these lines. By this spirituality he meant the idea of oneness of all, the wonderful idea of the eternal soul of man, the means to bring that divinity into practical manifestation, the harmony of all religions and unity in the infinite variety of life.

The full import of Swamiji's legacy is perhaps not fully realized even now. Though born in a land of such glory and rich heritage, Indians today find themselves drifting away, are looking to others to lead them to fulfill their hopes and aspirations. The so-called advancement of civilization, science and technology have only added to the confusion. While it has contributed towards material comforts and made possible a life of physical pleasures, it has robbed people of the poetry of life, of the growth and development of inner beauty and bliss. It is in this context we have to examine the relevance of Swamiji today and come to understand the wealth of his contribution towards the welfare of the human race.

Decisions and policies bereft of the spiritual touch are bound to produce shallow and impractical solutions to our problems. In the prevailing depressed atmosphere of moral decline and spiritual degradation, with political corruption all around, how can the beautiful ideals propounded by Swamiji be achieved? We have to remember that India has faced such problems in the past too. Our people

will certainly rise to meet the challenges of modern times as well. Swamiji's contribution in inspiring them stands unparalleled. Swamiji said that great objectives can be achieved only by hard work, dedication and intense involvement. May his faith, courage and wisdom inspire us, so that we may keep safe the treasures we have received. May we imbibe the spirit of Swamiji to face the problems and challenges of today and work out solutions with mature understanding.

How do we do it? Swamiji would have answered it by saying, "Be content to work and above all, be true to yourself. Be pure, staunch and sincere, to the very backbone, and everything will be all right. Intensely identify yourself as a spark of the Infinite Being. The history of the world is the history of a few men who had faith in themselves. Be free from jealousy and hatred, stand in the whirl and madness of action and reach your goal. Life refuses to yield its sublime secret to the lazy. The heart must be plucked out and placed on the altar of service to God and humanity. Then alone great things can be done." Swamiji assures us that with discipline, faith, courage and character we can achieve the highest and noblest and that it is far better to die in pursuit of a worthy ideal than to live and die like worms.

Today, religion seems to be at the centre of chaos and violent social disturbances. Now is the time when India needs practical integration and a greater faith in our spiritual unity because destabilizing communalism and separatism are challenging our national unity. For eliminating communal rancour and for establishing brotherly feeling in all the spheres of human association, Swamiji urged all to imbibe the spirit of harmony;

he advised us to work on a deeper understanding of the fundamental principles of religion and a more practical application of these in life, without distinction of caste, creed or colour. He instructed us to throw off the struggle between the externals of religion and emphasize our basic agreement; to establish our unified foundations; and deepen every individual's love and desire to serve the country. He tells us that secularism does not mean a non-religious attitude. It is a policy which upholds and allows the right of every religion to exist and grow in the spirit of its own beautiful tenets. Our leaders must remember that true religion can never be the cause of social chaos. It is the wrong use and interpretation of religion by bigots and fanatics, that is the cause of chaos. The true spirit of religion indeed brings harmony and peace everywhere.

Silently and steadily his ideas are helping us tackle the problems arising on our journey toward full nationhood. On a global level, his ideas of harmony, of unity behind the apparent diversity, of the need to seek spiritual development rather than to be lost in the craze for material wealth and consumerism are beginning to move the world. How blessed we are that such a great soul was born in our country and left his message to show us the way! The only thing for us to do now is to shake off our hesitation, laziness and fear. To achieve this, we all must imbibe the marvellous spirit of Swamiji. For the future of India, Swami Vivekananda has given to the nation enough work for centuries to come. It is upto us, his countrymen, to take up the scheme and work for the future of India which he believed, would be far more glorious than her past. ❀