



YUVA BHARATI

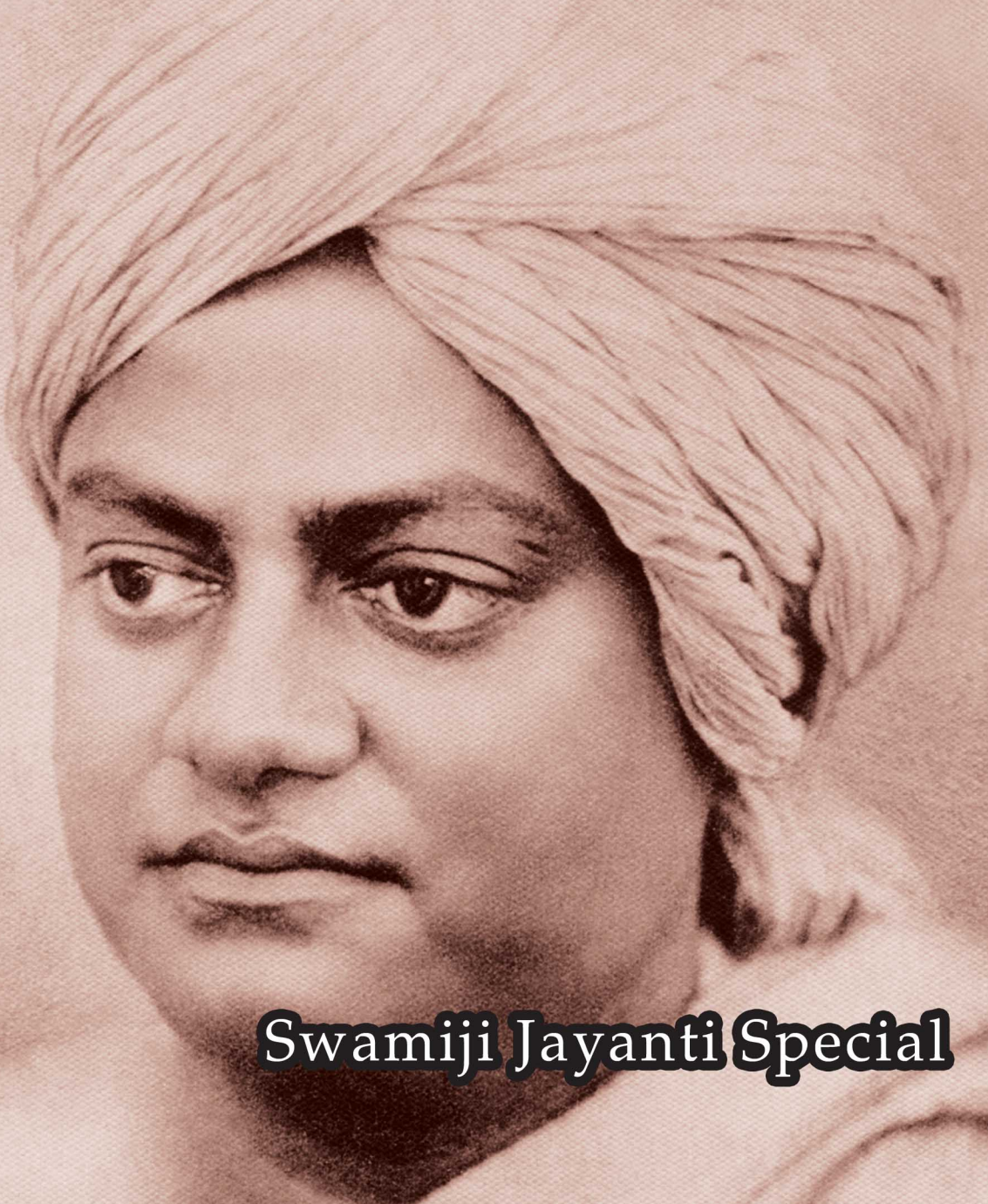
Voice of Youth

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Voice of Youth

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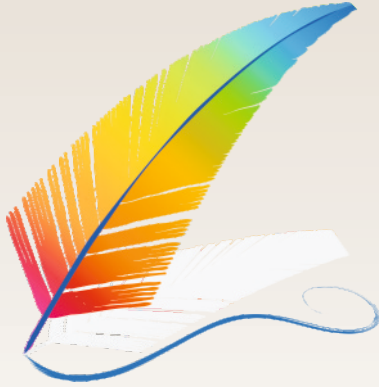
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Invocation

tamoghnāya himagnāya śatrughnāyāmitātmane
kṛtaghnagnāya devāya jyotiṣāṁ pataye namaḥ

Salutation to the one who removes darkness, who removes fog, who destroys the enemies,
who is limitless, who destroys the ungrateful, who is the shining one and who is the Lord of
the luminaries.

NATION PERSONIFIED



Very few personalities leave a mark that tramples time underfoot and even fewer are remembered for their fecund contribution that straddles political, religious and physical boundaries to touch the lives of people across many continents. Vivekananda stands head and shoulders above his peers in that very rare category of personalities for he energized our slumbering hundreds of millions to bristling activity with a message that resurrected the buried and almost-lost identity of the nation and its mission to be the spiritual beacon for humanity.

His message was not a narrow-minded Indian chauvinism; it was a genuine recognition of the need for Indian spirituality to reach every man as the medicine to heal the wounds that civilizations had caused upon themselves and others. It was this that Christopher Isherwood referred to when he wrote *"Vivekananda's revolution was a revolution for everybody; a revolution which would in the long run be of just as much use to the British as to the Indian. Vivekananda's nationalism, the call to India to recognize herself - this again was not nationalism in the smaller sense, it was a kind of super-nationalism, a kind of internationalism sublimated"*.

Vivekananda broke open the doors of Indian scriptures and democratized our religious texts to allow access to everybody thus ending an uncharacteristic denial of spiritual knowledge to the masses. Through the Ramakrishna Mission, he made sure that our eternal truths are taken to every nook and cranny in India and beyond. His revolution, though, was not just spiritual. His clarion call to social action is probably even more momentous than his revolution in spirituality. Rousing an enslaved nation, he declared *"What other vain gods shall we go after and yet cannot worship the God that we see all around us, the Virat? ... These are all our Gods - men and animals, and the first Gods we have to worship are our own countrymen"*. This call for reform starting from each individual, "root and branch reform" as he called it, jerked our masses into awareness eventually leading to political independence.

But political independence was only one step, the first step towards his vision. A century and some years later, Vivekananda's message still applies in just as important a context as spiritual democracy - it is democratizing our democracy. For when our livelihoods are robbed, there is no way we as a society can move towards spirituality. Today we are in the midst of a global awakening of youth. All claims of being driven from the backseat notwithstanding, every single revolution, from the ones spawning the Arab spring to the occupy movements in the west to our own India Against Corruption, each one that has gripped the world in the past year or so is remarkable because youth have been the prime-movers, demanding change and settling for nothing less than a complete makeover. Looking at the tens of thousands of youth protesting on our streets today calling for an end to corruption, we are only reminded of Sri Aurobindo noting *"we perceive his(Vivekananda's) influence still working gigantically, we know not well how, we know not well where, in something that is not yet formed, something leonine, grand, intuitive, upheaving that has entered the soul of India and we say, 'Behold, Vivekananda still lives in the soul of his Mother and in the souls of her children.'"*. While it is very heartening to see, the youth must also not be fooled by the power-hungry modern-day daityas into believing that half-steps or nominal changes signal success. The efforts should continue until the aimed end - of bringing accountability to public life and democratizing social and political power. While Sri Ramakrishna, Sarada Ma and Swami Vivekananda continue to guide us - let us make sure we follow in their directions and are not distracted wayward.

P.Vasanth
YB-ET

Oneness in practice: "Serve man Serve God"

Nivedita Raghunath Bhide

Swami Vivekananda on his return to India, in his very first lecture reminded India that it was the message of Oneness that she had to give to the world. For that she would have to prepare herself. But how the Oneness is manifested in life? Not by just chanting of Vedas but by feeling for all those who are suffering and are in need of help. Unfortunately, the degradation that had come in the society due to various invasions was such that this Oneness was almost missing in the lives of those very people who were supposed to guide the society. They needed to be woken up from their stupor and fall. That could be done only by stating the truth forthrightly. Swami Vivekananda did not mince the words when he touched upon the hypocrisy of our practice of Dharma. He said,

"A dreadful slough is in front of you -- take care; many fall into it and die. The slough is this, that the present religion of the Hindus is not in the Vedas, nor in the Puranas, nor in Bhakti, nor in Mukti -- religion has entered into the cooking - pot. The present religion of the Hindus is neither the path of knowledge nor that of reason -- it is "Don't - touchism". "Don't touch me!" "Don't touch me!"-- that exhausts its description. See that you do not lose your lives in this dire irreligion of "Don't - touchism". Must the teaching, "looking upon all beings as your own self"-- be confined to books alone? How will they grant salvation who cannot feed a hungry mouth with a crumb of bread? How will those who become impure at the mere breath of others purify others? Don't - touchism is a form of mental disease. Beware! All expansion is life, all contraction is death. All love is expansion, all selfishness is contraction."



Another hypocrisy was, though the people were very god-ward, the worship of God was limited to one's poojarooms while the starving and suffering people that swarmed around were neglected. Swami Vivekananda told them,

"For the next fifty years this alone shall be our keynote -- this, our great Mother India. Let all other vain gods disappear for the time from our minds. This is the only god that is awake, our own race --"everywhere his hands, everywhere his feet, everywhere his ears, he covers everything." All other gods are sleeping. What vain gods shall we go after and yet cannot worship the god that we see all round us, the Virat? When we have worshipped this, we shall be able to worship all the other gods. Before we can crawl half a

mile, we want to cross the ocean like Hanuman! It cannot be. Everyone going to be a Yogi, everyone going to meditate! It cannot be. ...Is it a joke? It is all nonsense. What is needed is Chittashuddhi, purification of the heart. And how does that come? The first of all worship is the worship of the Virat -- of those all around us. Worship It. ...These are all our gods -- men and animals; and the first gods we have to worship are our countrymen. These we have to worship, instead of being jealous of each other and fighting each other. It is the most terrible Karma for which we are suffering, and yet it does not open our eyes!"

Dharma (Way of life based on Oneness) has been life center of India. In spite of invasions after invasions she held on to her life center. Whenever there were challenges in her national life, India responded by drawing her strength and also the validation for the solution to the problems facing then on this grand truth of Oneness. For example during Islamic invasions when temples were broken and people were persecuted for going to temples and pilgrimages, came the traditions of great saints who told to worship God in the house, as God is not limited to temples and can be worshiped anywhere. Thus each house got its own temple and people could stick to their God. The British rule exploited our lands and wealth which led to utter poverty that our country had never known. A country which had the share of 33% in the world production was brought down to 1.5% by the British due to their policies of bleeding India white to death. And thus famines became the routine affairs. At times even one third population would perish in the famine affected area. At such times the earlier practice of holding on to Dharma by pooja, pilgrimages, Japa etc was improper. It did not reflect the feeling of oneness but rather a lack of it. But in a country obsessed with one's own mukti and with earlier practices for holding on to God it was a difficult task to convince people to work for the masses - the living Gods. Tirelessly, Swami Vivekananda worked to explain the concept

and need of Service and to inspire the young generation to take to it. Again it was on basis of Oneness of Vedanta that Swami Vivekananda explained how 'service to man' is worship of God.

Selfless Service is the manifestation of the feeling of Oneness

Swami Vivekananda explained how the Selfless Service is expression of Oneness in practice, expression of God-realization and also a way for God-realization. Swamiji told to do 'the service of Jivas in a spirit of oneness'. (Volume VII 198) For all those quoting Vedas and Vedanta he asked sternly, "Must the teaching 'looking upon all beings as your own self'-- be confined to books alone? (VI319)

Not even a Sanyasi according to Swami Vivekananda could be permitted to not to take to service of the needy. He wrote to his brother disciple Swami Akhandananda,

"It is preferable to live on grass for the sake of doing good to others. The Gerua robe is not for enjoyment. It is the banner of heroic work. You must give your body, mind, and speech to "the welfare of the world". You have read -- "look upon your mother as God, look upon your father as God"-- but I say "-- the poor, the illiterate, the ignorant, the afflicted -- let these be your God." Know that service to these alone is the highest religion." (Vol VI 288)

That One who has manifested as many is our real Self. Aim of life is to realize that Self. Thus serving others is for one's good as the other is only an extended form of oneself. When once a disciple asked that "What is the necessity at all for doing good to others?" Swamiji replied,

"Well, it is necessary for one's own good. We become forgetful of the ego when we think of the body as dedicated to the service of others -- the body with which most complacently we identify the ego. And in the long run comes the consciousness of disembodiness. The

more intently you think of the well - being of others, the more oblivious of self you become. In this way, as gradually your heart gets purified by work, you will come to feel the truth that your own Self is pervading all beings and all things. Thus it is that doing good to others constitutes a way, a means of revealing one's own Self or Atman. Know this also to be one of the spiritual practices, a discipline for God – realization. (Volume VII p 111)

To the god-oriented society of ours which had passed through many trials and tribulations to keep its religion alive, the society which had found the way to hold on to its religion by chanting names and doing poojas in the homes when the temples for pooja and social regeneration were destroyed, he told,

"After so much austerity, I have understood this as the real truth -- god is present in every Jiva; there is no other God besides that. 'Who serves Jiva, serves God indeed'." (volume VII 247)

The distorting thoughts that keep us away from service

The Truth of Oneness of existence is ultimate but it needs to be applied and practiced in life as per the needs of the time. When a society is vibrant and free, then it is bold and confident enough to apply the ultimate truth to the needs of life. But when society degenerates, declines, then it holds on to the old forms which have ceased to reflect the principle. But as in earlier days those old forms had served the purpose, the society refuses to let go the old forms just like holding a body of the dear one even though the life is gone. Not ready to take to the new ways of practicing the grand truth, it gives lot of arguments. The invasions and the colonial rule had incapacitated Indians for the dynamic application of the grand truth of oneness of the existence. Swami Vivekananda worked ceaselessly through his lectures, discourses, dialogues etc to correct the distorting thoughts that kept us away from the

service. The few of the distorting thoughts that even today keep us away from vibrant and dynamic service of the society are as below.

If you do not feel happy, this is not your way!

Sometimes we do start working for the society but we have to work in an organized way. When we work in an organized way many a times our ego is hurt, we have to submit to others, we have even to swallow the hurts and humiliations that make us unhappy. In such a situation the argument is, 'this must not be my path as I do not feel happy. One should take to only that what makes one happy. I am not cut for this!' But this is again an escape route. It is our Dharma to serve the society – the extended form of our own self. Dharma is one of the purushartha. Purushartha means striving. Even if we feel unhappy this Dharma of fulfilling our obligations to our family, society, nation, humanity and the whole creation should not be given up. The manliness is in doing what we are supposed to do even if it is not giving happiness or fulfillment. Initially, it would not give happiness if we are too much bound to our strong notion of 'I'. But actually to get rid of this binding and blinding 'I' we have to employ ourselves in the selfless service of the society. Swami Vivekananda explains,

"As by continuing our religious practices we gradually develop a certain determined tendency for it, so by performing disinterested work over and over again, even unwillingly, we gradually find the will merging itself in it. The inclination to work for others develops in this way, do you see? Just do some such work even though unwillingly, and then see if the actual fruit of Tapasya is realised within or not. As the outcome of work for the sake of others, the angularities of the mind get smoothed down, and men are gradually prepared for sincere self-sacrifice for the good of others."

to be continued...

Sparsa Vedi Swami Vivekananda

N.Krishnamoorti

We do not as yet know how historical processes are influenced or shaped. An event considered not very significant at a particular time may assume gigantic proportions of importance in later centuries. And an event considered earth-shaking by its contemporaries may fizzle out and become a flash in the pan of history.

Similarly there have been historical personalities who are given birth by the pressures of the contemporary society and there are personalities, who leave an abiding impact on the history after that period. The patterns in history which scholars see are often as good as their persuasive power and are as good as their clout and hold on the publicity machine.

Swami Vivekananda had a slow, continuous, solid and steady and continuous impact on his contemporaries and on those who lived immediately after him. He continues to influence his readers. Many such persons have recorded in their writings Swamiji's direct influences on them.

Swamiji's influence on the Indian freedom movement, our service movements and on the great luminaries such as Mahatma Gandhi, Sister Nivedita, Subhas Chandra Bose, Shri Aurobindo and Subrahmanya Bharati is well known and is well-documented. Comprehensive volumes have been written on

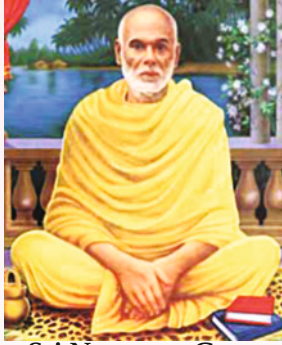
the mark he left on the world scenario and on spiritual seekers. The Belur Sri Ramakrishna Math's publication *100 years of Chicago-Swami Vivekananda* is monumental in its conception and records not only events but also trends which were set in motion by Swamiji. Much of our understanding of inter-disciplinary subjects such as science and spirituality, service as a process of restoring social bonding, and social cohesion as a prelude to economic prosperity owe their origin at least in parts to Swamiji's creative genius.

Now it is time to search for the less known influences, less-studied impacts and less understood connections of Swamiji with people and processes.

1. Subtle thoughts – gross influence: On a South Indian tour Jamnalal Bajaj, treasurer of the Indian Congress in 1930's, and Rajendra Prasad called on Ramana Maharshi at Tiruvannamalai. (They stayed in the Ramanashram between 18.8.38 and 23.8.38). Their conversation went like this.

Devotee: Why does not the Maharshi harness his great energy with that of Mahatma Gandhi to strike off the fetters of slavery of Mother India?

Bhagawan: You want to know how the sages work and about other such problems of man. I tell you till you know what you really are, you



Sri Narayana Guru

cannot in the least understand any of these. Understand yourself-first, then everything will be clear to you.

After sometime he added, THERE IS A SAYING OF SWAMI VIVEKANANDA

THAT A RISHI'S THOUGHT CONCEIVED IN A CAVE HAS ITS EFFECT ON THE WHOLE WORLD. IT IS LITRALLY TRUE.

At the time of their departure, Rajendra Prasad asked Bhagavan: Mahatma Gandhi has sent me to the Maharshi. In there any message that I can take to him?

Bhagawan: What message is needed when heart speaks to heart. It is the same Shakti which is working there also.

2. SEED THOUGHT-GROWING INFLUENCE: In 1980-81, The Delhi Ramakrishna Mission organized a series of lectures on Enlightened citizenship. One session was presided over by Shri S.K.Dey the then Minister for Community Development of the Government of India. Shri Dey described how Swami Vivekananda, the 'Human Dynamo' (as he called him) gave him the idea of Development thought community work. The work has now become 'Block Development Work' in progress in over 7000 Blocks in India, and Panchayati Raj work in 7 lakhs of Indian villages. Development through and by the community was theme dear to Swamiji.

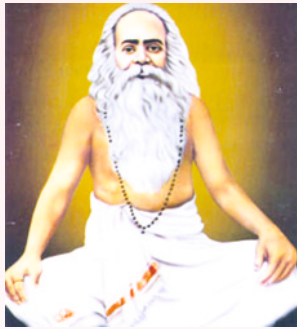
3. A number of men of letters who got introduced to Swami Vivekananda's writings at a young age blossomed into eminence when they grew old. And they acknowledged their indebtedness to Swamiji's inspiration.

Sumtranandan - Pant Suman and Vatsyayan (Ajneya) both Hindi writers translated Swamiji work into Hindi. They later went on to win Jnanpith awards, so did Nirala. The Kannada writer K.V.Puttappa (Kuvempu) also a Jnanpith awardee acknowledges his inspiration from the Sri Ramakrishna tradition. Puthezhuttu Raman menon (Malayalam writer) too was influenced by Swamiji.

4. A study of Swami Vivekananda's response to the artificial, man-made, famine of Bengal has been undertaken by a scholar GWILYM BECKERLEGGE. He writes "*The effects of social and economic pressures exerted under British Administration, were widely felt upon the exercise of philanthropy within Indian Society. Many landlords, who traditionally had been expected to exercise a philanthropic role in times of hardship and famine moved into the cities, some taking up new forms of philanthropic activity approved by the British rulers. The disruption to caste, extended family networks, and corporate village life caused by the profound economic and social changes experienced in rural India, also deprived the destitute of a further traditional source of society.*"

Steering clear of politics Swami Vivekananda insisted primarily upon the Internal transformation of individuals as a way of changing external social condition. It is obvious that Swami Vivekananda saw a non-governmental solution to the problems of the society, problems such as famine relief. According to Swamiji, spiritually motivated young men and women alone can bring about the coveted salvation, help, social rising up and social equality, believes Beckerlegge.

5. In the field of medicine: Dr.G.Venkataswamy, the founder of Aravind eye care system has built up an eye-care-system that is world class. The honours that came to him for securing the eyesight to millions of poor people sat lightly on his shoulders. The Harvard University's Divinity



Sri Chetampi Swami

school invited Dr.G.Venkatasamy to deliver the WIT LECTURES. In that lecture he said: "In 1940s-50s Swami Vivekananda attracted the hearts of our young people. His emotional, inspiring and powerful lectures bestirred me too. They kindled in me a great desire to take up some challenging task, and fulfill it. I avidly read my father's collection of Swami Vivekananda's books and tried to understand our ancient religious and cultural principles. In my college days, I have studied Swamiji's Rajayoga. Swamiji's speeches and writings have attracted millions of learned people across the world. They also have inspired Indians and took to them the teachings of Jnanis. Swami Vivekananda shines as a builder of awakened India. Similarly I studied Sri Ramakrishna's teachings with eagerness". (passage, Translated from Tamil)

Such influences among others shaped him and his philosophy of service. G.Venkataswamy's father Sri Govindappa Naicker established at the entrance of his village-house a majestic portrait of Swami Vivekananda.

6. In the social Sphere : Another heroic figure who was guided by Swami Vivekananda was Dr.Palpu an Ezhava doctor from Southern Kerala. This brilliant researcher with an intense social consciousness battled caste prejudices and financial problems to graduate from the Madras Medical College. But he could not get a job in his home province. He moved to Mysore where he was engaged in anti small pox and anti plague operations and research. He met Swami Vivekananda in all probability in 1892, and asked the saint for spiritual initiation. Swami guided to him seek

a Saint from Palpu's own community. Dr, Palpu's going to the famous saint Narayana Guru, not only did open his spiritual doors, but also turned out to be an eventful turn to the Ezhava fortunes. Sri Narayana Guru received him and set Dr.Palpu on his spiritual and social track. Dr.Palpu was among those who worked for sending Swamiji to America. Through Swami Vivekananda's disciple Sister Nivedita and her friends in the British Parliament Dr.Palpu arranged to have questions asked in the parliament regarding the treatment of Ezhavas in Travancore. And this resulted in an enquiry into their problems. Dr.Palpu's work on these lines contributed in a large measure in bringing about a favourable change in the government's policies towards Ezhavas and other communities. Dr.Palpu's son Sri Natarajan become Saint Narayana Guru's successor.

Under Sri Narayana Guru's guidance Dr.Palpu and the well-known poet Kumaran Asan formed the Shri Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam (SNDP) in 1903 and Kumaran Asan became its first general secretary. A monthly magazine called VIVEKODAYAM was brought out as the organ of the yogam. The Yogam since has blossomed into a gigantic service organization touching all aspects of life of the people especially the followers of the Guru. Kumaran Asan wrote a foreword for the bye-laws of the yogam. He started it with a quotation for Swami Vivekananda that religion is the grip for pulling India up or down.

The list of people in whom the fire of spiritually oriented patriotic service was kindled by Swami Vivekananda is long. As he himself has said Swami Vivekananda continues to work through various people, movements and methods for the uplift of his beloved Bharat.

Strength, Strength, Strength... the only solution

Prof. Dr. K. Subrahmanyam

The rhythm of Swami Vivekananda's lectures, and the music of his message was his frequent reference to human weakness as the cause of all suffering and to strength as the best remedy. Weakness according to the Swami was at the root of all human misery. 'It is not by brooding over weakness that one becomes strong but by remembering strength'. The Swami was, therefore, never tired of exhorting people to shun weakness: 'weakness is death'. 'This world is not for cowards. Do not try to fly. Look not for success or failure'.

Cowardice in any form is detestable. Hinduism does not preach cowardice. Whichever makes man weak, it is sin, to be shunned, to be dispensed with. It is weakness at the physical, emotional, intellectual and spiritual levels, that causes one to suffer. A strong body never suffers from sickness. One has to be manly. It is only the strong that can really renounce. Real renunciation is an outcome of enlightenment. Enlightenment is the fruit of strength at all levels. To feed and thrive on others' labour is to be a parasite. To compete with others for a piece of bone is cannibalistic. Co-operation is a compromise among the mediocre. And self-reliance is strength; it is manliness. Giving up one's own personal interest for the welfare of others is possible only for a man of real and benevolent strength, which is divine.

At the emotional level it is due to weakness that one becomes a slave to senses or suppresses senses to soar in sweet dreams. It is beastly to indulge indiscriminately in sense pleasures. The mediocre make an agreement between the senses and sense objects for fear of ill health or bad reputation. A man of strength is capable of commanding



both senses and desires. Strength in the emotional plane implies one's own unfaltering devotion to the ideal.

At the intellectual level, it is weakness to be dragged by ego while reasoning. It is due to cowardice that one gets caught like a moth in bondage. Enshrouded intellect gives way to superstition. Enslaved intellect prepares a mask of defence mechanism for failure. Selfishness is, of course, the making of intellect under the direction of ego. It is strength, it is manliness that gives freedom to intellect and thereby it checks ego, prejudice, and selfishness. The intellect thus of strength and freedom sparkles in discrimination to overcome superstition and partiality and paves the way finally for enlightenment.

Thus, it is strength that manifests as self-reliance, sense-control and discrimination leading to self-dedication, sense-sublimation and enlightenment through action, emotion and intellect. If one is spiritually weak, that weakness has its effect on intellectual, emotional and physical expressions. If the spirituality is strengthened, all evils at all levels will fly away. The Swami therefore says,

We have wept long enough; no more weeping, but stand on your feet and be men. It is man-making religion that we want. It is man-making theories that we want. It is man-making education all round that we want and here is the test of truth --- anything that makes you weak physically, intellectually and spiritually, reject as poison, there is no life in it, it cannot be true. Truth is strengthening, Truth is purity, Truth is all-knowledge, Truth must be strengthening, must be enlightening, must be invigorating.

Very often we come across a strange experience within us and in others. What we think, we cannot speak; what we speak we cannot do. Actions are not faithful to speech and speech is not faithful to thoughts. The cause for all this, according to the Swami, is weakness. Like

parrots we repeat great words and ideas, without putting them into practice. Inability to translate a thought into action has been our habit. It is all due to physical weakness. And strength is the only remedy to make the ideals worked out into actions, words into deeds.

If the will is weak, it cannot hold on to a resolution or an ideal. If the feelings are weak, they cannot be genuine and pure. If the bodies are weak, they cannot translate anything good and worthwhile into action. Therefore the first and foremost need is to strengthen oneself. The Swami's love for strength was such that he went to the extent of saying,

"You will be nearer to Heaven through football than through the study of the Gita You will understand the Gita better with your biceps, your muscles, a little stronger. You will understand the mighty genius and the mighty strength of Krishna better with a little of strong blood in you. You will understand the Upanishads better and the glory of the Atman when your body stands firm upon your feet and you feel yourselves as men.

The realization of the Atman is not possible for a weak person. The whole of Sri Krishna's message in the Gita is to make people strong at every level. Strangely, in India, the scriptural and religious injunction that people should be strong was not cared for and as the Swami said, there was a deplorable condition in India. As a nation we have become weak, weaker than women, fawn.

Mere goodness without sufficient strength to execute it is of no use. 'Even if you sin, sin like a man' says the Swami. He wants men to be of indomitable will, invincible courage and strength. Strangely, he said he had all admiration for Milton's Satan, for his boldness and strength. He went to the extreme step of asking an aspirant to tell a lie, if he wanted to

progress. Goodness out of weakness is useless as the vow of fasting by a beggar, celibacy of the impotent, and a vow of silence by the dumb. In all his speeches and writings and movements, why, even in his very personality, it is strength, strength that is everflowing. He was so strong right from his childhood that his mother had to engage many nurses to control him. Vexed with his abundant and dynamic strength, his mother used to complain that her prayers were for a son, but Lord Shiva had sent her one of his 'Bhutaganas'.

If Swami Vivekananda's pronouncements on strength are taken away from his letters, lectures, writings, and conversations, perhaps there will be nothing left in his work worthy of our appreciation. If he and his message are popular among people today, it is chiefly because of his dynamic exhortations on strength, both personal and national.



A nation is advanced in proportion as education and intelligence spread among the masses.

I am neither a politician nor a social reformer!

My job is . . .

Mukulkanitkar

What was the purpose of Swami Vivekananda's life? Though it may be deemed arrogant to ask such a question, for those who want to follow his path it is very important to address this basic query in right spirit. The purpose of life is what makes the personality what it is.

Swamiji as an Avatar?

Some devotees like to believe Swamiji to be an avatar and they would simply say the purpose of avatar is to establish Dharma and that's what Swamiji did. But the founder of Vivekananda Kendra, Ma Eknath ji Ranade would consider calling Swamiji an avatar as an escapists' argument. By calling him avatar we are shunning our responsibility to follow his path. On the other hand it is belittling his achievements also. "If he was a divine incarnation, I feel, what he did was not very much. But on the other hand if I think he was as human as any one of us then I feel that he has achieved a great height. At the same time, I get the inspiration to keep a noble goal before myself and to emulate his path to greatness." Eknathji would argue.



What were Swamiji's thoughts on the matter? He has uttered many a things about himself. He has also written about his life's mission in some of his letters. But never has he called

himself an avatar. That should be the ultimate test. Notwithstanding the vision of Shri Ramakrishna Paramahansa reported by some devotees to back their avatar claim; we will be more honest if we use Swamiji's method to decide the issue. Narendra was also faced with the same dilemma about his Guru. Many devotees called Shri Ramakrishna an avatar. Narendra himself had many miraculous experiences with the great master. He attained Nirvikalpa Samadhi, had Shaktipat (Transfer of Spiritual power by touch) and also the Sakara Darshan (Vision in Form) of Mother Kali by the grace of the great Guru. Still he could not come to a definite conclusion as to Shri Ramakrishna being a divine incarnation till the very last days of Thakur. To resolve the dilemma he decides in his mind, "I will accept him as a divine incarnation, an avatar, only if he himself directly tells me so." It is documented that he got the answer then and there. As if the Guru was reading the mind of the disciple, Thakur, taking Narendra's hand proclaimed very clearly, "One who was Rama, who was Krishna, has now born as Ramakrishna"; leaving no ambiguity whatsoever.

Hence we must apply the same test for deciding whether Swamiji was an Avatar or not. According to the documented and available information he never claimed to be one. He was not shy of speaking about himself. As early as in 1891 he is known to have said, "I will burst upon the Indian society like a bomb". He fulfilled this self prophecy. Talking to his disciple he extolled, "I may leave this mortal body, but I will continue to work for next 1500 years." So he does. But there is no mention of his calling himself an Avatar. Thus till any such new discoveries are found we are bound to take Swamiji's word for his purpose of life as a

human being rather than an Avatar.

References to his mission:

He has distinctly made a few comments on his mission which was dawned upon him in the intense meditation at the Shreepad Shila in Kanyakumari. He had written in one of his letters to Shashi Maharaj, Swami Ramakrishnanda, "Sitting on the last bit of Mother Bharat, I hit upon a plan". He has explained his plan of campaign in a lecture in Madras after his triumphant return from the west. But we are after the purpose of his life. The mission and plans are to fulfill the purpose. What was the purpose of Swamiji's life? He himself had struggled hard within and without to find this. He was convinced that there was a noble purpose but most of the time it was elusive. On Hatharas station he told the station master Sarat Chandra Chakroborty, who later became his first sanyasi disciple, Swami Sadananda, "I see my purpose of life like the hill covered by the morning mist. My destiny beckons me. I have to move on."

What others say:

Many people have given him many lofty attributes and rightly so. Some called him the patriot monk, warrior monk, the savior of Hinduism, the second Shankaracharya, a social reformer. Bhagini Nivedita says about his address in the Chicago, "Of the Swami's address before the Parliament of Religions, it may be said that when he began to speak it was of 'the religious ideas of the Hindus', but when he ended, Hinduism had been created." Thus almost announcing him the father of neo-Hinduism. He has been credited as one of the greatest pioneers of Indian renaissance in the 19th century. His own brother Bhupendranath Dutt talks about his (failed) plans of organizing political revolution to free India

from foreign rule. Likes of Bipin Chandra Pal and Brajendranath Seal would agree to call him a political activist. This may not be authenticated by available documents but there is no doubt that his life and message inspired generations of freedom fighters both of armed and nonviolent type.

"He was so great, so profound, so complex. A Yogi of the highest spiritual level in direct communion with the truth who had for the time being consecrated his whole life to the moral and spiritual uplift of his nation and of humanity, that is how I would describe him. If he had been alive, I would have been at his feet" Said Subhash Chandra Bose many a times. On the other hand Rajaji, Sri Chakravarthi Rajagopalachari calls him a savior of Hinduism, "Swami Vivekananda saved Hinduism and saved India. But for him, we would have lost our religion and would not have gained our freedom. We therefore owe everything to Swami Vivekananda." Bal Gangadhar Tilak who had hosted Swamiji in Pune during his wanderings equates him with Adi Shankaracharya, "It is an undisputed fact that it was Swami Vivekananda who first held aloft the banner of Hinduism as a challenge against the material science of the West. It was Swami Vivekananda who first took on his shoulders this stupendous task of establishing the glory of Hinduism in different countries across the borders. And he, with his erudition, oratorical power, enthusiasm, and inner force, laid that work upon a solid foundation. Twelve centuries ago Shankara was the only great personality who not only spoke of the purity of our religion... but also brought all this into action. Swami Vivekananda is a person of that stature." Rabindranath Tagore when asked by the french Historian Roman Rolland, how can he understand the spirit of India? Said, "If you

want to know India, study Vivekananda."

Father of Hindu Nationalism:

The accolades he received during his lifetime and thereafter are countless and the list still continues to grow longer and longer. Even the critics of Hinduism in the modern times in search of the roots of Hindu upsurge during the Ramjanmbhumi agitation reach back to Swamiji for so called ideological foundations. They try to put the blame on Swamiji among others for the revival of Hindu Nationalistic spirit. He is considered to be father of Hindu Nationalism by those in favor as well as those against the idea.

Preacher of Vedanta:

There are many others who are fascinated by his depth of spiritual knowledge. The scientific way in which he articulated the mysteries of highest spiritual knowledge is unparalleled. Hence he was called the foremost preacher of Vedanta in the west. It is also claimed by some that he conquered the west and converted many to Vedanta.

Swamiji's personality and his message was multifaceted hence there are many ways of understanding Swami Vivekananda. Each one does it from one's own respective point of view. This has made Swamiji the most acceptable, non controversial ideal of the modern times. People from opposing camps use his quotations to prove their side of argument and blame the other of misrepresenting him. The left ideologues who denigrate religion also accept Swamiji's views on the regeneration of deprived masses. But in all this process, sometimes, there is a deliberate effort to dilute Swamiji's Nationalism, his in-depth understanding of the soul of Bharat. He was the first religious and spiritual leader to proclaim that the soul of

Bharat was 'Dharma'. He was the first proponent of the concept of Hindurashtra, the Hindu nation. This should not be forgotten and any effort to prove it otherwise is an attempt to twist his message to suit the present day vested political interest.

Self Prophecy:

In this cacophony of diverse and sometimes even contradictory claims about Swamiji how do we find the answer to our query? What was the purpose of Swamiji's life? Here again we must rely on the original text rather than the interpretations which may be within or out of proper context. Is there any statement of the Swami about his own self? What was his view about himself and his work? There are loads of indirect references in his speeches in India. There are a few direct discussions recorded by his disciples which give us an insight in to his mind. But the most direct statement on the topic is, "I am not a politician, nor am I a social reformer. It is my job to fashion man... Man-making is my mission of life."

To Fashion Man:

What a great statement? To Fashion man! What does it mean when one uses the verb to fashion? Rogers's thesaurus gives us a lot of options - to design, to tailor, to style, to mould, to modify etc. When we apply it to humans what will be the most consistent meaning. To fashion man- is to transform. To use Swamiji's own words, 'to enable man to manifest the perfection already within.' To fashion is to train to realize the potential divinity in practical life. To make one actualize the full potential. To make one realize the special purpose of his life and to progress on that path.

Swamiji did that all his life. He transformed the life of everyone he touched. The list is long and varied. Swamiji's man making technology

which Sister Nivedita later on qualified by adding its prime objective as "Man Making for Nation Building" was unique for each of its beneficiary. To study this transformation brought about by Swamiji in hundreds of people is an interesting way to understand the science of human excellence and the various methods of unfolding it.

Self Transformation by Efforts:

The mission started early in his life. The first experiment of his self proclaimed job was on his own personality. It is an interesting saga of self transformation through intense enquiry, struggle within and without, experimentations and in short total and continuous efforts. The whole journey is in four distinct stages Biley to Narendra, Narendra to Sachchidananda / vividishananda (his sanyasi names during the initial wanderings), Kolkata to Kanyakumari - From Wanderer to a determined Vivekananda with a mission and finally the Missionary Vivekananda Chicago to Belur. This is not the occasion to examine the whole journey but the methods of Fashioning involved. The prime urge was to realize, to experience. No pretence, no belief no acceptance without thorough logic and questioning. He not only questioned others, but his self questioning continued all through his life till the end. As confident as he was of his mission and the success of it, still he kept on asking am I on the right path. His openness to discussions and acceptance to change at any stage is really inspiring. Though the process went on all his life the most important period of intense self-transformation is his encounters with Shri Ramakrishna. That fashioned the Vivekananda that we know. It was not an easy process. The struggle went on. Both of them suffered a lot. Each one sticking to one's own

ways. Swamiji's adamancy was to be tamed only by realization. He did many experiments under the guidance of his Guru. This acceptance of Thakur as Guru also came only after the mystic experience of the oneness through touch- Shaktipat. But the final surrender and giving up of the rigid ego was done by the greatest of the experiences – Vision of Kali as a Chinmayi (living, conscious mother). This was the turning point which made him realize that the divine was omnipotent, omniscient and can be realized in all forms. This made him internalize the revolutionary Gospel of Shri Ramakrishna – Shiv Bhava Jeev Seva. Serve the living being with the full understanding of its divinity. This became his life mantra, "Service to humanity as an offering to the divinity."

The self accepted vocation to Fashion man continued more vigorously after the Guru left the mortal form. The initial period of 3-4 years was very testing. The domestic situation was worsening. Thakur had given him the responsibility to keep the Sangh, the monastic order of young disciples together. The

householder devotees had their own ideas. During this period Narendra kept all his brother disciples in constant contact and saw to it that they did not forget the call of the master as well as their inner fire of Vairagya was kept alive. It was a daunting task. The whole well meaning world of relatives, families and even the householder followers of Thakur were against the idea. But Narendra kept it alive in the tough times and gave it a shape in Varahnagar Math.

This man-making mission continued throughout his life and even there after. We see great examples of total transformations in this journey. There are examples like Swami Ramtirh, a Professor of Mathematics in Lahore, who attended Swamiji's lectures there on Common Bases of Hinduism and Vedanta and got so inspired that he renounced and became a great Sanyasi. But there are few example of Man-making that will give us the insight into the science of the art of Human Fashioning. We will try and study some of them in detail in the next part.

SHIBIR CALENDER - 2012

NAME OF THE SHIBIR	DATES	AGE Years	CAMP DONATION
Spiritual Retreat (Eng)	07 - 13 Feb	18 to 70	Rs. 1500/-
Spiritual Retreat (Hindi)	07 - 13 Feb	18 to 70	Rs. 1500/-
Yoga Shiksha Shibir (Eng)	05 - 19 May	18 to 60	Rs. 2000/-
Yoga Shiksha Shibir (Hindi)	05 - 19 May	18 to 60	Rs. 2000/-
Spiritual Retreat (Eng)	07 - 13 Aug	18 to 70	Rs. 1500/-
Spiritual Retreat (Hindi)	07 - 13 Aug	18 to 70	Rs. 1500/-
Yoga Shiksha Shibir (Eng)	01- 15 Dec	18 to 60	Rs. 2000/-
Yoga Shiksha Shibir (Hindi)	01- 15 Dec	18 to 60	Rs. 2000/-

Vivekananda's Role In Expanding The Moral Imagination Of America

Jagmohan

During his visit to India, from November 6 to 8, 2010, President Obama made a significant observation about the antiquity and nobility of India's culture and the contribution that it has made to the advancement of human civilization. In his address to the Indian Parliament on November 8, he said: "My confidence in our shared future is grounded in my respect for India's treasured past – a civilization that has been shaping the world for thousands of years. Indians unlocked the intricacies of human body and the vastness of our universe...India not only opened our minds, she expanded our moral imagination".

Obama also made a specific reference to the celebrated visit of 'renowned Swami Vivekananda' to his home town, Chicago, more than a century ago, and recalled what Vivekananda had underlined in his address to the Parliament of Religions: "Holiness, purity and charity are not the exclusive possessions of any church and every system has produced men and women of the most exalted character".

Our media, obsessed as it is, with affairs of small politics and wholly oblivious of the need to engender national pride and healthy respect for the positive aspects of our heritage, took no notice of the above quoted contents of Obama's speech. It found no space to reflect upon either the past strength of the Indian civilization or its contribution to the elevation of the American mindscape. In this article, I would attempt to



make up for the neglect and highlight the historic role which Swami Vivekananda played in placing the jewels of the ancient India thought before the American people and thus help them in increasing the dimensions and depth of their moral imagination.

What a tremendous impact was created by Swami Vivekananda, during his two visits¹ to the United States, can be seen from the following observations made by Eleanor Stark, a noted American academician of our times:

There was an advent on the American scene of a voice from the East which, in a few short years, sowed the seeds of a regeneration of a great people. At the turn of the century, an unheralded and quiet revolution took place

across the land. A message was given by Vivekananda to the American people in words of such universal wisdom and power that those who heard him at the time found their lives changed and their spirits freed. It was a message of humanism in depth, a ringing declaration of a science of human development that did not deny but deepened to new dimensions America's achievements in science and humanistic philosophy. It was not a call to a new religion but to a new way of thinking about religion; not a call to an emotional revival as a catharsis for fear and insecurity, but a call to a universal science of spiritual life that affirmed man as God and asked him to look within, to turn inward in order to discover the ground of his Being, and there to discover the same ground in all².

Before Vivekananda's visits to the United States, hardly any American was aware of the ennobling features of the ancient Indian philosophy and the deep insight it provided into the ultimate Reality. The only three great exceptions were Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry Thoreau and Walt Whitman. It was Emerson who had brought home to a limited circle of American intellectuals the core of the Indian thought – the philosophy of Vedanta. In his remarkable poem, Brahman, published in 1856, he explained, in a simple and succinct idiom, the Vedantic belief in the fundamental unity of existence, the indestructibility of the human soul and the 'individual self' being an inseparable part of the 'Overall Self'. He wrote:

If the red slayer thinks the slays,
Or if the slain think he is slain,
They know not well the subtle ways
I keep, and pass, and turn again.

Far or forgot to me is near;
Shadow and sunlight are the same;
The vanish'd gods to me appear,
And one to me are shame and fame.

They reckon ill who leave me out;
When me they fly, I am the wings;
I am the doubter and the doubt,
And I the hymn that Brahma sings.

Emerson had also noted another unique feature of Vedanta, namely the evolutionary character of its thought-processes, its relentless search for the Ultimate Reality and its constant endeavor to move from 'lower level of truth' to 'higher level of truth'. Insightfully, he had pointed out: "Hinduism believes that our life is an apprenticeship to truth, that around every circle another circle can be drawn".

Thoreau, who was a born believer in non-violence and whose influence on Gandhi is well-known, was also deeply touched by the Indian spirit. This should be clear from the highly reverential reference he made to the *Bhagvad-Gita* in his write-up, *The Pond in Winter*. He reflected:

I bathe my intellect in the stupendous and cosmogonical philosophy of the Bhagvad-Gita, in comparison with which our modern world and its literature seem puny and trivial. I lay down the book and go to my well for water, and lo! there I meet the servant of the Brahman, priest of Brahma, Vishnu and Indra, who still sits in his temple on the Ganges reading the Vedas, or dwells at the root of a tree with his crust and water jug. I meet his servant come to draw water for his master, and our buckets grate together in the same well. The pure Walden water is mingled with the sacred water of the Ganges.

The strands of the Vedantic thoughts are also found scattered in Walt Whitman's celebrated works, *Leaves of Grass* and *Song of Myself*. The former has, in fact, been described by quite a few critics as a mixture of the Bhagvad-Gita and the New York Herald. In the song of

Myself, the Vedantic concepts of divinity of life and unity of existence are easily discernable:

The East and West are mine
And the North South are mine
I am larger, better than I thought
In the face, of men and women
I see God, and
In my own face in the glass.

Clearly, the basic features of the Vedantic philosophy were known in the mid-nineteenth century America. But this knowledge was restricted to a few literary giants³ of the period. It was left to Swami Vivekananda to serve, at the end of the nineteenth century, as 'the great Ambassador of Atman-Brahman' to the American people at large and disseminate, with 'flaming clarity', the meaning and message of Vedanta.

By the time of Vivekananda's arrival, America had become a huge economic power-house. Its society was experiencing unprecedented affluence, and its science and technology were making rapid strides. It had made a dramatic improvement in the arena of public health. Huge metropolises were rapidly emerging on its landscape, symbolizing its great prosperity as well as its great skills of management. The industrial and business enterprises, too, were expanding at a fast pace. It was truly the Great American Age of Enterprise. But it was also America's Gilded Age in which worship of Mammon had supplanted all virtues and values. Acquisitiveness had seized the society and the moral law was gasping for its last breath.

Every sensitive American was feeling that something was going out of his life. He experienced a certain 'hollowness of heart', and found himself working like a robot, 'stopping when it was red and moving when it was green'. The outward gleam was causing corrosion within. The stability of personal life

was being increasingly threatened. The society in general was experiencing a new kind of agony – an agony emanating from broken families, drug-abuses, love of the gun and insatiable hunger for money and material goods. Wide disparities of income had also come about. There was the 'Other America'⁴ as well – America of the deprived and disprivileged. In short, the great principles, which had given birth to the American nation and given to it a constitution based upon noble human values, were withering away in face of the fury of conscienceless and compassionless materialism. A reliable estimate, made in 1896, showed that "90 per cent of the nation's property was owned by one eighth of the population, while increasingly large number of Americans were propertyless altogether".

The essence of the conditions, then prevailing, found most apt expression in the following observations made by Walt Whitman in his essay, *Democratic Vistas*, written in 1871 :

The depravity of the business classes of our country is not less than has been supposed, but infinitely greater. The official services of America, national, state, and municipal, in all their branches and departments, except the judiciary, are saturated in corruption, bribery, falsehood, mal-administration; and the judiciary is tainted. The great cities reek with robbery and scoundrelism.... In business, the one sole object is, by any means, pecuniary gain... The best class we show is but a mob of fashionably dressed speculators and vulgarians... I say that our New World democracy, however great a success in uplifting the masses out of their sloughs, is, so far, an almost complete failure in its social aspects... It is as if we were somehow being endowed with a vast and thoroughly appointed body and then life with little or no soul.

It was in these environment of rising material prosperity and collapsing moral values that Swami Vivekananda arrived at the American scene. He had, at home, already acquired a complete mastery over the ancient Indian scriptures and given a new orientation to the basic philosophies of India. When he started delving deep into the country's religious literatures, he had come face to face not only with different interpretations of the Vedantic philosophy, but also with the scattered traditions of the Vedantic philosophy and also with the scattered traditions of different cults, such as Sivaism, Vaishnavism, Shakti and Bhakti. Most of these cults had suffered a steep decline. The evil practices of the past had remained unattended, and many more were creeping in. The overall scenario was depressing, diffused and incoherent. The misery and helplessness of the masses which Vivekananda had seen at the ground level, during his extensive wanderings in the country, had provided another dimension to his thoughtful mind.

All this led him to undertake the much needed work of reinterpreting and reorganizing Hinduism. He picked up the healthy strands of different schools and systems of thought and weaved them in the form of a clean and comprehensive doctrine which may be called Neo-Vedanta. This doctrine rests firmly on the corner stone of Upanishadic philosophy which believes in the essential Oneness of man and inextricable unity of human existence. But it finds fault with the 'life-negating' aspect of Sankara's Advaita which virtually leads to the destruction of the individual self. It believes that it is not by life-negation but by positive and practical action towards improvement of the self that life's higher purpose of reaching the Supreme Self is achieved. The goal should be to lead a life of day to day action, within the overall frame-work of Advaita morality or 'monistic ethics' and realize God through

service to Man-attaining 'Shiva' through 'Jiva'.

It was this well-thought over philosophy of Neo-Vedanta, culled out of the most profound and positive traditions of Hinduism, which Swami Vivekananda took to America. His very first engagement created a great impression upon the public mind. When, on September 11, 1893, he rose to speak at the Parliament of Religions and addressed his gathering as simply brothers and sisters, he was greeted with a thunderous applause. It was instantaneously recognised that his thinking was different from others. Every sentence he subsequently uttered thrilled his audience. When he said that the Hindus regarded "all religions as so many attempts of the human soul to realize the Almighty", or when he pleaded that "on the banner of every religion should be written 'assimilation' and not 'destruction'", the voice of peace and plurality, love and harmony, was heard for the first time. His quotes from Vedic literature – "Whoever comes to Me, through whatsoever form, I reach him", and "all men are struggling through paths which in the end lead to Me" – were models of both precision and lucidity. They went straight to the heart of the listeners.

While the delegates of other faiths spoke about their 'Gods', in terms of dogmas⁵, Vivekananda expounded the Hindu belief in the Universal Being who embraced all 'Gods'. The crux of his pronouncements was that all items of life and nature were permeated with the same Divine Consciousness, and all individuals and all faiths were united at their base with this Consciousness.

Vivekananda's various addresses at Chicago were marked by immense clarity, convictions and scholarship. His dazzling performance was extensively publicised in the American press. For example, the *New York Herald* hailed him as the greatest figure in the Parliament of

Religions and observed: "After hearing him we feel how foolish it is to send missionaries to the learned Indian nation". The Review of Reviews described his addresses as 'noble and sublime', and the Boston. Evening Transcript rated him as a great favourite at the Parliament.

All this made Vivekananda famous and brought him a number of invitations which he accepted, hectic schedule notwithstanding. He spoke at the universities, city centres, churches and other public and private gatherings. By way of his speeches, he lighted up quite a few dark spots in the American soul, and made it to look at the larger purpose of life – the purpose of establishing a true kingdom of God on the earth and building a fair and just order for the entire human race, drawing strength and sustenance from the great spiritual force embedded in man. Let me take you to the arenas, one by one, on which he directed the search-light of his thought and made his contribution to the enlargement of a moral vision of the American society.

In most of his speeches, Vivekananda expounded various aspects of the Vedantic philosophy and high-lighted the emphasis that this philosophy places on self-realisation and discovery of Eternal Divine Force⁶ of which man is a constituent and to which he is also a contributor. The real issue is one of attaining a stage of higher spirituality where there is only worship of the Spirit by a spirit, and Aone is reached by alone. Such a higher stage of spirituality⁷ makes Hindu a better Hindu, and a Christian better Christian.

Vivekananda argued that what was conventionally regarded as religion was really an ethnic religion, with all its dogmas and doctrines. The real religion was only one. Unhesitatingly, he told his audience: "There was never my religion or yours, my national

religion or your national religion. There is only one religion – One Infinite Religion existing all through eternity and will ever exist, expressing itself in various ways in different communities, countries and races". Every religion, he elaborated, was true; but it was perfected within man only through self-realisation and identification with the Eternal Divine Force. Vivekananda, thus, provided to the American people a new perspective on religion and opened a new vista for them to move to a higher level of thinking.

Another significant contribution of Vivekananda was that he asked the Americans to realize that even their adherence to Christianity was superficial. He told them bluntly: "I am not here to flatter you. I want to show you the way out of self to God by pointing out to you your errors, your defects, your vanities. Where is your Christianity? Where is there a place for the Jesus the Christ in this selfish struggle? If he were here today, he would not find a stone whereon to lay His head". Time and again, he made it clear that without serving the divinity that is ingrained in the poor, the sick and the needy, religion would be meaningless. He underscored: "I do not believe in religion which cannot wipe out the widow's tears or stop the orphan's wail".

Vivekananda also wanted the American public to understand that, since in this universe every item of life and nature is interconnected and enmeshed in the web, all activities, economic or social, must occur within the framework of monistic ethics and no other component of unified existence should be made to suffer in the process or accorded any special privilege. In his lecture on Vedanta and Privilege, he said: "None can be Vedantist and at the same time admit of privilege, either mental, physical or spiritual". He denounced the disposition to accumulate wealth and ridiculed the mystique of 'trickle down' effect.

Vivekananda did not find any fault with American spirit of enterprise or search for higher standards of life. Nor did he fail to appreciate the great organizational skills of the people, their drive and dynamism, and the rapid advance they had made in arena of science and technology. But he warned them of the dangers of science and technology. But he warned them of the dangers of ignoring spiritual growth and thus creating imbalances at the individual as well as social levels. He impressed upon them the need to understand that for digesting material prosperity, spiritual strength was necessary. He said: "Machines never made men happy and never will. Happiness is always in the mind".

The mismatch between material boom and spiritual recession in America led Vivekananda to ponder over the very nature of Western and Eastern civilisations. He came to believe that the active spirit of the West and contemplative spirit of the East, the 'manliness of the former' and 'saintliness of the latter', needed to be welded. While superficial observer of the conditions, then prevailing, argued that the East was East and the West was West and never the twain would meet, Vivekananda thought a new civilisation must be fashioned out by dove-tailing the healthy sinews of the Western civilization with those of the Eastern civilization. He advocated synthesis⁸ of the positive features, wherever they existed. This advocacy was the natural outcome of Vivekananda's belief in the essential One-ness of man and the entire human race being an inextricable unit of the Universal Self.

Many sensitive Americans of the times were deeply troubled that quite a few dogmas and doctrines of their faith were at variance with the findings of modern science. They were facing an acute moral dilemma. Vivekananda

showed them the way out of their predicament. He told them that faith in the Vedantic philosophy, that is, in the all-pervasive Divine Consciousness/Cosmic Intelligence, which was the Mother of all Religions, would enable true religionists to come to terms with science. In one of his highly perceptive lecture, delivered at San Francisco, he said: "The Vedantic idea is the infinite principle of God embodied in everyone of us. God is spirit and He should be worshipped in spirit and truth. Does spirit live only in heaven? We are all spirit. Why is it that we do not realize it? What makes you different from me? Body and nothing else. Forget the body, and all is spirit".

What it implies is that there is nothing like a personal God, and everything in this universe is the manifestation of a Great Spirit and Divine Force from which we come, through which we live and in which we get absorbed at the end.

If we take out this idea of personal God from our mind and replace it with an all-pervasive Divine Force, we would find that apparent difference between religion and science disappear. The latest and the highest achievement of modern science has been the dematerialisation of the matter. It has been discovered that all the elements which constitute the universe can be split and reduced one vital item – Energy. What the scientists call Energy is, in the language of the Vedantists, the Divine Force or Cosmic Intelligence. In the belief-system of the former, Energy permeates the universe and sustains it; in the vision of the latter, it is the Divine Force or Cosmic Intelligence. In the belief-system of the former, Energy permeates the universe and sustains it; in the vision of the latter, it is the Divine Force which pervades the universe and maintains it. The difference is only of terminology and method of conceptualization. The existence of an all-

pervasive Force is recognized by both the modern scientists and the Vedantic sages. This phenomenon was elucidated by Vivekananda in a highly perceptive address given by him at New York on January 19, 1896. He said:

We now see that all the various forms of cosmic energy, such as matter, thought, force, intelligence, and so forth, are simply manifestations of that cosmic Intelligence or, as we shall call it henceforth, the supreme Lord. Everything that you see, feel, or hear-and the whole universe – is His creation, or to be still more accurate, is the Lord Himself.... He Himself is both the material and efficient cause of this universe, and He it is that becomes involved in the minute cell and evolves at the other end and becomes God again. He it is that comes down and becomes the lowest atom, and slowly unfolding His nature, rejoins Himself....In one word, we are born of Him, we live in Him, and unto Him we return.

Him, here, is the Divine Force/Cosmic Intelligence in the vision of the Vedantists and Cosmic Energy in the theoretical propositions of scientists. In their basics, they are one and the same thing. It is, indeed, amazing that, about 150 years ago when Einstein theory of Relativity was unknown and Particle sciences and quantum Physics had not made much headway, Vivekananda pinpointed the area where science and Vedantic Philosophy⁹ converged to reveal the nature of the Great Spirit or the Ultimate Reality.

It was Vivekananda who, for the first time, opened to the Americans the vast panorama of the Indian system of Yoga¹⁰ which had been designed to secure all round development of man. Each component of his personality—physical, mental and spiritual – had to be taken care of through four main sets of yoga practices, namely, Yoga of mind, Raja Yoga. Vivekananda explained to the people

both the meditative and practical aspects of these four sets in a manner that was easily intelligible to the Western mind, and advised them to follow the system of Yoga in its entirety, if they wanted to create a right kind of man for the future. He said: “We want to see a man who is harmoniously developed, a man whose heart feels intensely the miseries and sorrows of the world, a man who can not only feel but also find the meaning of things”¹¹.

In another lecture, delivered after a few days of the above lecture, Vivekananda added the attribute of spiritual self-reliance to the attributes of the man he wanted to see in the coming days. He underlined: “You gain nothing by becoming cowards...You have cried to all the gods in the world. Has misery ceased? The masses in India cry to sixty million gods, and still die like dogs. This bending of the knees to superstitions does not befit you. You are infinite, deathless, birthless... First have faith in yourself. You are the proof of God. 'Thou are that'.”

Vivekananda's emphasis on learning the basic tenets of yoga-philosophy and following the practices envisaged by it was aimed at making the right kind of man, a man who was knowledgeable, active, compassionate, spiritually self-reliant, well-balanced and well-harmonised. He believed that without such a man, neither a healthy social order nor a just state nor universal brotherhood could be built. Man, all said and done, remains the basic building block on which social and political structures stand, be they in America or India or elsewhere.

From what I have brought out above, it should be clear that Vivekananda took his audience to the highest level of spirituality, where Mother of all Religions, that is, Eternal Divine Force, could be perceived; where the little 'self' of man and Great Self of God lost all distinction;

where man saw God in the service of the poor and the needy; where the ideals of equality, liberty and fraternity were not enshrined merely in the Constitution but in the sould of the society and the State; and where science and religion could recognized as emanating from the same Supreme Force; where the best of the East and the best of the West could mingle to create a materially and spiritually balanced civilization; and where, in brief, all dichotomies ended and unity of existence could realized.

Apart from the vast span of ideas that Vivekananda traversed in his discourses, he invariably spoke with the poise of a saintly philosopher and the passion of an inspired poet. The impact was overpowering. A social elite, returning home after listening to Vivekananda at Oakland, told his wife: "I have just heard not a man but God speaking". Another enlightened member of his audience, Christine Greenshed, after attending Vivekananda lectures at Detriot, wrote: "The power that emanated from this mysterious being was so great that one all but shrank from it. Was it possible to hear him and ever be the same again? All one's values were changed". Marie Louise Burke of San Francisco, who had carried out a detailed research on Vivekananda's techings in America, said in conclusions: "As I see it, by its very nature the deep centre of an illumined mind shines over the relative world, redeeming it and awakening it; and it was this activity, this shining forth in its full perfection and power which constituted Swamiji's greatest service to America....In and through everything he said and did his profound calm and peace, his

boundless compassion for all humanity and his ready ability to awaken in others loomed large". His lectures on Vedanta were so impressive that he was immediately offered the Chair of Eastern philosophy at Harvard University. His 'many a splendoured' nobility led one of his disciples to comment: "Some marvel at his purity, some at his power, some at his intellectuality, some at his serenity, which was like the depth of the ocean, unperturbed by the waves of applause and contumely".

To what extent Vivekananda's preaching created a permanent impact on the attitudes, outlook and ethos of the American people is difficult to ascertain with any degree of precision. There have been, before and after Vivekananda, other poets, philosophers and leaders who made their contribution in orienting the American mind towards nobility and humanism. It is not possible to separate their impact from that of Vivekananda's. nevertheless, it could be said with confidence that Vivekananda's influence on the American mindscape has been both distinct and substantial.



The subsequent idealism, which some of the top thinkers, and even some Presidents, of America displayed, was basically on the same wave length as the message of Vivekananda and the inspiration that led to the framing of the American Constitution. In this regard, I may give an example. In 1915, President Woodrow Wilson, while addressing a few American citizens of foreign birth, said:

My urgent advice to you would be, not only always to think first of America, but always also, to think first of humanity... I am sorry for the man who seeks to make personal capital

out of the passions of his fellow-men. He has lost the touch and ideal of America. For America was created to unite mankind.

Here, one can clearly see the same stream of thought that was presented to the Americans by Vivekananda a few years earlier. There are many other ways in which Vivekananda's Vedantic philosophy and impassioned plea for accepting the common ancestry of man and for humanizing the societies all over the globe found a permanent abode in their inner layers of American consciousness.

At the same time, a tragic fact has to be recognized. And this fact pertains to the continued existence of negative forces inherent in materialism, marketism and militarism which Vivekananda had denounced. With the passage of time, these forces attained acceleration and made the twentieth century as the bloodiest century in human history. It witnessed, besides two most brutal world wars, the worst act of barbarism—holocaust, Concentration Camps, genocide and bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

In social sphere, too, the 'march of the folly' became faster. Today, in America, one violent crime is committed in every 22.2 seconds, one murder every 30.9 minutes, one rape in every 5.7 minutes, one robbery in every 1.2 minutes and one aggregated assault in every 36.6 seconds. In respect of inequality, the conditions are equally sad. One of every eight Americans lives in poverty; yet the top one per cent of the population accounts for about 22 per cent of the total national income. There are 250 million privately owned guns. About 30,000 people, on an average, die every year from gun wounds.

It is time that America realizes that, if further descent to social chaos has to be arrested, it has to tap that segment of its moral imagination

which Vivekananda and thinkers of his genre, such as Emerson, Thoreau and Walt Whitman, had helped in making. It must put its state and society in a balanced and enlightened orbit and move towards the creation of a truly just and fair global order which treats every man as a unit of a single family emanating from, and merging in, the same Divine Force. Only then an America would come up which would command respect throughout the world not only for its material or military strength but also for the nobility of its civilization.

¹ Swami Vivekananda undertook two visits to the United States, the first from 1893 to 1896 and the second from 1899 to 1900.

² Eleanor Stark : The Gift Unopened. P.xix to xx.

³ Edgar Allan Poe was another prominent literary figure of the times who seemed to have been influenced by the ancient Indian thought. His work, *Eureka*, published in 1848, shows that he was aware of the contents of Upanishads. Presumably, the English translations of ancient India's classical literature had started traveling from England to America. During the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, a number of such translations had appeared. Cole Brooke had translated the *Vedas* and Wilkins the *Bhagavad Gita*. About the unique merit of the ideas contained in *Gita*, Warren Hastings had recorded: "These would survive when the British Dominion in India shall have long ceased to exist". Such laudatory references to Indian thought were bound to make them attractive to the American intellectuals.

⁴ 'The Other America' was the name of famous book, written by Michael Harrington in 1962. It showed that even in the affluent society of America, "tens of millions of peoples were maimed in body and spirit, existing at levels beneath those necessary for human decency."

⁵ Representatives of some religious groups were so exclusivist in their outlook that they even declined to attend the Parliament by saying that their religion was the only religion and it could not assume equality or parity with other religions.

⁶ In Vedantic literature, the terms Ultimate Reality, Ultimate Truth, Great Self, Overall Soul and Eternal Divine Force have, in essence, the same meaning.

⁷ Spirituality has been rightly defined as "something that refers to the experiential dimension of religion in contrast with formal beliefs, external practices, and institutions; it deals with the inner depth of the person that is open to the transcendent; in traditions that affirm the divine, it is concerned with the relation of the person to the divine, the experience of the divine, and the journey of the person to a more intimate relationship with the divine".

⁸ Vivekananda's thought process was basically oriented towards synthesis. Romain Rolland called him a Great Synthesiser, and noted: "In the two words, equilibrium and synthesis, Vivekananda's constructive genius may be summed up. He embraced all the paths of the spirit, the four yogas in their entirety renunciation and service, art and science, religion and action, from the most spiritual to the most practical.... He was the personification of the harmony of all human Energy."

⁹ Vedanta, in essence, is the science of the Soul. It appeals to the

rationalists as much as to the mystics. Nobel Laureate Erwin Schrodinger has pointed out that the fundamental issues thrown up by Quantum Physics could be resolved only through Vedanta, the ancient wisdom of Upanishad. Recent advances in science are making it more and more clear that the Universe is more like a Great Thought than a Great Machine. Albert Einstein's theory of matter being a forum of energy, Werner Heisenberge's hypothesis of 'uncertainty principle', splitting of the nucleus of atom into 248 sub-particles, the smallest being merely a resonance, and the disvoerty that the nature of electron is elusive, all go to show that

there is nothing like "materialistic determination", that relationship between cause and effect is not always definite and that 'free-will' has a definite role.

¹⁰ Yoga literally implies 'yoking' empirical and transcendental consciousness. It is a system of disciplining body and mind with a view to attaining higher level of understanding of the Ultimate Reality.

¹¹ Lecture at San Francisco; April 1899.



*Material science can only give worldly prosperity,
whilst spiritual science is for eternal life.*



There is no leader in our country who has pondered over the health of our nation in all its varied aspects as the illustrious patriot saint Swami Vivekananda. His patriotism had its roots in the depths of our nation's spiritual heritage, but his nationalism grew like a giant banyan tree propping itself up on an infinite number of roots, covering the entire fertile area of nation's possibilities and potentialities. Added to this was his deep conviction that India has a message to the entire humanity and that has to be conveyed through the lives of its people. That is what made him bring Vedanta from its Himalayan heights to become practical in the lives of the lowest and lowliest in the country.

His meditation on the rock at the land's end of India added a universal dimension to his nationalist ideas, confirming his dreams and aspirations on the role of Mother India as a JAGAT GURU. As we are celebrating the 150th anniversary of Swamiji's Birth Anniversary it will do good to remind ourselves of the vision Swamiji has bequeathed to us and his very valid observations as to why we have failed in achieving what we should have.

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*"It is when the national body is weak that
all sorts of disease germs,
in the political state of the race or in its
social state,
in its educational or intellectual state,
crowd into the system and produce disease"*
Swami Vivekananda

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We all know that our national body is weak today with all types of disease germs debilitating it at all fronts. One can't but wonder how could Swami Vivekananda, way back in 19th century so clearly foresee this weakness and the consequent onslaught of the terrible disease.

The Indian nation is a multifaceted gem with its varied cultural traits, races, religions, languages and so on. It is only natural that our problems are therefore more complicated, more momentous, than the problems in any other country. But that doesn't mean that there are no solutions for these. The unfortunate thing is that we all know the cure but do not have the national will to apply the medicine. The vested interests that dominate our

national scene today continue to project the diversities but not the unity of our people, further and further fragmenting our nationhood. Recognition of unity in diversity had been the uniqueness of Indian culture. Instead of discovering the unity and endorsing it through educational, constitutional, political formulations, attempts are made to deliberately keep the people divided for petty political gains. This is the double tragedy afflicting the nation today. At this rate of dispersion and disruption how long can we hold to our nationhood?

The greatest torture to which our society is presently subjected to is the revival of casteism in its most terrible and endangering form. The occasion demands that we look at the situation through the eyes of the Master Builder Swami Vivekananda who foresaw this calamity and forewarned us.

During his wanderings over the country, after the passing away of his Master, Swamiji made very sincere attempts to discover the strength and weaknesses of our nation. His aim was to strengthen further the pillars that have carried this magnificent monument of this nation from ancient days and thus pull the nation out of its enfeebling weakness. He understood that India is the crucible of a gigantic spiritual amalgamation and the benefits of this must be shared by the entire mankind. Scattered throughout the Vivekananda literature we find his well-considered observations on both the positive and negative aspects of casteism and other national problems. It would be a good



education for all of us to recall some of his very valid observations in order to face the challenges which threaten to tear apart our centuries' old social fabric. Even if the '*maddening*' crowd is not willing to listen to it, at least those who have not yet lost their sanity would certainly gain through this exercise.

Swami Vivekananda's perceptions take us back to the very root of our problem. When comparing it with the European civilization he says, inter alia, "*The object of the peoples of Europe is to exterminate all in order to live themselves. The aim of the Aryan is to raise all to their own level, nay even to a higher level than themselves. The means of the European civilization is the sword; of the Aryans, the division into various Varnas (natural*

castes). This system of division into varnas is the stepping stone to civilization, making one rise higher and higher in proportion to one's learning and culture. In Europe it is everywhere victory to the strong and death to the weak. In the land of Bharata every social rule is for the protection of the weak."

Clarifying further he adds: "*The institution of caste has always been very flexible to ensure a healthy uprise of the races very low in the place of culture. It put, theoretically at least, the whole of India under the guidance - not of wealth, nor of the sword - but of intellect chastened and controlled by spirituality.*"

Institutions such as these were necessary to protect our nationhood in those bygone days. Those which have outlived their purpose must

now die a natural death. Swamiji points out that it is refusing to give up privileges that has been the ruin of the caste system. This can now be hastened in two ways; the 'higher' reiterating the spiritual *ONENESS* and extending their hands of sympathy and help, the 'lower' putting all-out efforts to suffuse themselves with a new confidence and strength that modernism can provide and coming out of the throes of caste stigma. They must show a readiness and willingness to break open their shackles in the larger interests of themselves and the nation rather than be fooled into accepting backwardness as a treasure to be perpetuated for ever.

Whatever we any do at the social or political levels, in the final analysis, it is the individual's or group's sincere effort alone that will bring strength and dignity. Without the concerted effort from both sides, focused on the vision of the whole, we would only be widening the gulf with every succeeding generation, plunging our nation deeper and deeper in to the abyss of perennial class/caste conflicts and confrontations. We must have a very tall leader like Swamiji to take us out of this deep abyss.

Only when spiritually viewed does life show its totality, wholeness and dynamism. Nurturing the spiritual awareness and aspirations of our people is the only sure remedy that Swami Vivekananda prescribes for our national malady. *"All evils come relying on differences. All good comes from faith in equality, in the underlying sameness and oneness of things."* Giving up religion and along with it spiritual aspirations of man, is not the remedy. Swamiji points out that *"religion must be kept within its proper limits and society must be given the freedom to grow"*. He further adds, *"All the reformers in India made the serious mistake of holding religion accountable for all the horrors of priest craft*

and degeneration of society and went forth to pull down the indestructible structure; and what was the result? Failure. Caste is simply a crystallized social institution which after doing its service is now filling the atmosphere of India with its stench; and it can only be removed by giving back to the people their lost social identity."

This same mistake is being repeated today as well and the results are for all to see. To nourish truly secular instincts in one and all and eradicate fanatic sentiments and approaches, a universal spiritual dimension must be stressed upon in every aspect of our national life. Real secularism is unfortunately getting transformed into pseudo-secularism adding its own share to the stench.

Swami Vivekananda was extremely averse to the idea of caste as a hereditary system which he knew hinders man's progress. On the other hand he could also find some intrinsic worth in the intellectual categorization of the people so that entire groups of people could be helped and supported in every way to move forward.

In this progress Swamiji aimed not only for economic or political freedom but also for a moral, cultural, intellectual and spiritual kinship based on true freedom of mind. He believed in leveling up and not in leveling down.

Variations in capacity and occupation can't be ruled out or eradicated by any number of constitutional means. They must remain in the society to make it richer, dynamic, ever moving forward. At the same time Swamiji reminds us that *"our mission is for the destitute, the poor and the illiterate peasantry and laboring classes and if after everything has been done for them first, if there is spare time then only for the gentry....."*

"One must raise oneself by one's own

exertion.....this holds good in all spheres".

In that lies the glory of mankind. We must help the less fortunate ones to help themselves to regain their vitality. Swamiji adds his warning note when he says, *"But then you must take care not to set up class strife between the poor peasants, the laboring people and the wealthy classes. Make it a point not to abuse the moneyed classes."*

He was a champion of the cause of the poor, the fallen and the downtrodden and urged his countrymen to correct the mistakes of the past by preaching Vedantic ideals to one and all, irrespective of caste, creed and sex so that they all can discover the essential divinity within.

Presently, with questionable intentions, selfish motivations and wrong methods, we have tried to bridge the gap and the result is predictably, utter chaos. We have once again proved that even good work when carried out in an improper way creates a backlash which will hurt the giver and the receiver.

For the regeneration of India his Mahamantra was '**RENUNCIATION AND SERVICE**'. He called upon Indians to intensify them in all spheres of national life to check the erosion of spiritual values by materialistic encroachments.

Who will show the light? For that matter who has the light anyway?

