Vivekananda: The Seer Poet of “Immense Poetic Sensibility & Spiritual Profundity”

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Abstract
Vivekananda lectured on the Hindu mind and culture, religion and Vedanta, with all the learning of a university professor and artistry of a seasoned orator, the dignity of an archbishop and the grace and winsomeness of a free and natural child. That is why Professor J.H. Wright says, “Here is the man who is more learned than all our learned professors put together.” His poetic output, though limited, is yet the microcosm to the macrocosm of all the gorgeous volumes of his lectures. In the moments of great ecstasy, he used to compose poems and hymns which rank with the creation of sublime poetic art. His poems present a splendid blend of immense poetic sensibility and spiritual profundity, intellectual balance and indefatigable energy, unselfconscious universal love and the authentic voice of a prophet. His sense of renunciation, devotion, quest, innate mystic effulgence, self-realization, and the consequent philosophic offspring – all are there converged in his poetry inseparably fused. His poems may appear diverse, but there is unity in the diversity: a profound sense of divinity runs latent, like a gold wire, through the scattered pearl like fine poems, binding them into the circular whole.

Keywords: Vivekananda, Seer Poet, Indefatigable Energy, Spiritual Solitude, Saint, Self-Realization

1 Introduction
Swami Vivekananda was a towering spiritual personality who awakened the slumbering Indian consciousness with his soul stirring vision of a dynamic spirituality. He is often viewed as the patron saint of modern India and many great figures acknowledge their debt to the life and works of Vivekananda. The teachings of Swami Vivekananda are universal in their scope and are meant for people belonging to all strata of society, all religions, and all races. Swami Vivekananda’s powerful words awaken the minds of the readers, in still self confidence and courage to face the problems of life, fill their hearts with love and spirit of service, and guide them through the difficulties and uncertainties of life. As per his sayings, “A few heart-whole, sincere, and energetic men and women can do more in a year than a mob in a century. A tremendous stream is flowing toward the ocean,
carrying us all along with it; and though like straws and scraps of paper we may at times float aimlessly about, in the long run we are sure to join the Ocean of Life and Bliss. Above all, beware of compromises. Hold on to your own principles in weal or woe and never adjust them to others through the greed of getting supporters. Your Atman is the supports of the universe whose support do you stand in need of? Above all, beware of compromises. I do not mean that you are to get into antagonism with anybody, but you have to hold on to your own principles in weal or woe and never adjust them to others through the greed of getting supporters. After every happiness comes misery; they may be far apart or near. The more advanced the soul, the more quickly does one follow the other. What we want is neither happiness nor misery. Both make us forget our true nature; both are chains--one iron, one gold; behind both is the Atman, who knows neither happiness nor misery. These are states, and states must ever change; but the nature of the Atman is bliss, peace, unchanging. We have not to get it; we have it; only wash away the dross and see it.”

Vivekananda’s poems are a spontaneous sublimation of his inner working and there are ample clues in his poems exposing the graded development of the saint. Years of intimate association with Sri Ramakrishna, in the secluded exchange between Guru and disciple, cause spiritual growth and transformation in the young intellectual: ‘as from a chrysalis, Narinder Nath has emerged as Vivekananda’. He says:

> I surrender myself to my Guru, the Man, the God,  
> the physician of the melody of this Samsara ……. (A Hymn to Sri Ramkrishna)

He reveals himself as a staunch worshipper of Kali:

> Mother Supreme! O may Thy gracious face  
> Never be turned away from me, Thy child!  
> There at those blessed feet, I take refuge! (A Hymn to the Divine Mother)

And in the bliss of apocalyptic vision he voices:

> Who dare misery love,  
> And hug the form of Death,  
> Dance in Destruction’s dance  
> To him the Mother comes. (Kali, the Mother)

Vivekananda has sung hymns in reverence and praise of Siva also. To him, it seems there is no difference among the three – Sri Ramakrishna, Kali, and Siva: they are three in one and one in three. He says that he has led a very hard life in the quest for perfection:

> And how many days have I passed on alms!  
> Friendless, clad in rags, with no possession,  
> Feeding from door to door on what chance would bring,  
> The frame broken under Tapasya’s weight……..  
> In the quest, “Superstitions” and “Misery” and “Sin”, the “Angels Unawares are the holy trio that propelled his spirit to understanding: “Love, Love, that’s the one thing, the holy treasure”.  
> Consequent on deep meditation, he reveals his self realization:  
> From dreams awake, from bonds be free!  
> Be not afraid, this mystery,  
> My shadow cannot frighten me!  
> Know once for all that I am He!

The byproduct of this hard earned spiritual fulfillment is ‘universal love’ that manifests through the three sacred ‘SSS’: Sympathy, Service and Sacrifice. He finds: “every living temple shines Thy face”.

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So, he disapproves idol worship and passionately advises men to sympathize and to worship the living God:

Ye fool! Who neglect the living God,
And His infinite reflections with which the world is full,
While ye run after imaginary shadows,
That lead alone to fights and quarrels,
Him worship, the only visible!
Break all other idols! (The Living God)

This principle of service to or worship of living God influenced Tagore. He too frequently expressed the idea in his own ingenious way. There is a song in *Gitangali* which scoffs at blind worship:

Leave this chanting and singing and telling of beads.
Whom dost thou worship in this lonely corner of a temple with doors all shut?
Open thy eyes and see thy God is not before thee. ….
He is there where the tiller is tilling the hard ground and where the path maker is breaking stones….

### 2 The theme of spirituality & self-realization advocacy

The theme of spirituality remains present in almost all his poems where the traits of mysticism and deep meditation can easily be glanced and his mysticism is perhaps the finest one of its own kind. Dr. Anupama Bansal observes: In Indian English poetry Swami Vivekananda, was the first poet who compose mystical poetry. His songs, hymns and poems are the artistic expression of his unfathomed spiritual urge. He is an advocate of self-realization like Swami Paramhansa Yogananda. According to him meditation is only remedy to dissolve the mist of illusion. It is none but God who is behind the ever changing phenomenon of the world which is nothing but a figment of creation. God is supreme reality in the world of unreality. This idea is revealed in his poem ‘Misunderstood’:

This world of dream
Though live it seem
And only truth is He the living!
This real me is none but He
And never never Mother changing. …..

India has always welcomed changes. Change is inevitable and is to be welcomed. But the modern day society should have the wisdom to know where to change and where not to change and move cautiously towards the rightful destination. He sings:

Change not thy nature, gentle bloom,
Thou violet, sweet and pure,
But ever pour thy sweet perfume
Unasked, unstinted, sure. …

### 3 First monk to openly welcome science

Vivekananda was perhaps the first monk to openly welcome science. But to add that there has to be a synthesis of science and spirituality, ancient wisdom and modern efficiency. He wanted the modern youth to make use of the Vedic Vision of India to strengthen their moral fabric, acquire the right work culture and go through an internal adjustment to guard them against the onslaught of modern material culture.
The word culture is derived from Latin word ‘cultura’ which means ‘to refine’ or ‘to cultivate’. That means civilization is skin–deep whereas culture is much deeper than that. People do mistake civilization for culture. Vivekananda, the great modern seer, tried to uphold culture and devoted his life to establish ancient Vedanta culture of India in the world.

Vivekananda gave the examples of the civilizations like Greek, Roman, etc. but when the civilizations invaded by less cultivated and barbaric hoards of Persia or Mongolia they fell. The civilizations were based on physical strength and power which were easily ruined by the better physicality and barbarism. India survived the attacks because its power lies in its spirituality and culture. Swami Vivekananda tried to demonstrate that it is culture that makes for lasting progress.

4 The divinity of man- the divine unity of all creation

Indian culture is based upon Vedanta which believes in the divinity of man- the divine unity of all creation. This culture also advocates the fundamental harmony of all religions. The Vedas say, “Truth is one, sages call it by many names.” This very philosophy needs to be placed before the humanity and Vivekananda did it successfully. He believes that we may able to live like a world fraternity by following the philosophy of Vedanta. He feels that the greatest need of human at present is mutual love, compassion and co-operative action which alone can ensure lasting peace, well-being and prosperity to all.

Vivekananda once said, “I have experienced God, I can show Him to you because I know the ‘method’ which can give the experience of the highest and subtlest truth.” This is true significance of Vedanta. It reveals the spiritual truths of the causes of man’s birth, sorrow, misery, evil, death and shows the remedy to go beyond all of them. It destroys all sorrows forever and brings in eternal bliss to the aspirant. It makes us realize that we are immortal, divine beings and not the body and mind in which we dwell temporarily and discard at the time of death.

The poetic utterances of Vivekananda, our first cultural ambassador to the West, are fine fragments of philosophy; they appear like excerpt from the Vedas and Upanishads, and the Gita rendered in exquisite English. The poet in him finds ecstasy in his meditation and realization. Most of his longer poems are symbolic, with their ‘empyrean of pure connotation’, in their constitute to borrow Yeats’ words - ‘transparent lamp about a spiritual flame’.

5 Spiritual Solitude

His poetry is also strikingly modern. Unpoetic and obtuse words like ‘blood’, ‘gun’, ‘smoke’, ‘battle’, ‘shell’, ‘atom’, ‘flesh’, ‘nothing’, ‘censure’, ‘venom’, etc. recur and become astonishingly poetic in his rhythm. He has even painted a vivid picture of a battlefield:

The martial music bursts, the trumpets blow,
The ground shakes under the warriors’ tread;
The roar of cannon, the rattle of guns,
Volumes of smoke, the gruesome battlefield…

Vivekananda’s tiny poetic output is thus enough to suggest his poetic genius. It gives an inking of his evolution and the bliss of his “Spiritual Solitude” enshrined in a complex activity of his mission and selfless devotion to humanity. The tradition of expressing Hindu philosophy in English verse, thus started by Vivekananda as the harbinger of Renaissance in India, has gained momentum, effectively influenced Tagore and reached a climax in the works of Sri Aurobindo.

The dazzling colour of devotional passion apart, there is an atmosphere of universality in the poetry of Vivekananda: to adopt Radhakrishnan’s praise of Tagore, ‘everyone – a Hindu or a Christian, a
Mohammeden or a Jew or a Heathen - can find one’s own religion in most of the poems of Vivekananda. Not to exaggerate, his poetry as a whole is an interpretation of God’s way to men.

6 Conclusion

With its intensity and quality, the poems of Vivekananda indicate that had he courted the Muse, as his mission of life, he would have certainly emerged as one of the greatest poets of the world.

7 References


