

Uttishthata Groupzine

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Human Excellence

उत्तिष्ठत जाग्रत प्राप्य वरान्निबोधत ।

uttishthata jāgrata prāpya varānnibodhata।

Arise, awake, and learn by approaching the excellent ones.

Arise! Awake! and stop not till the goal is reached.

- Swami Vivekananda

आ नो भद्राः क्रतवो यन्तु विश्वतः ॥

ā no bhadraḥ kratavo yantu viśvataḥ ॥

Let noble thoughts reach us from every direction - RigVed

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The National Significance of Swami Vivekananda's Life And Work

- Sister Nivedita

Continued from previous issue...

(Written in *The Hindu*, July 27, 1902, few days after Swami Vivekananda's MahaSamadhi)

To him, nothing Indian required apology. Did anything seem, to the pseudo-refinement of the alien, barbarous or crude? Without denying, without minimising anything his colossal energy was immediately concentrated on the vindication of that particular point, and the unfortunate critic was tossed backwards and forwards on the horns of his own argument. One such instance occurred when an Englishman on boardship asked him some sneering question about the Puranas, and never can any who were present forget how he was pulverised, by a reply that made the Hindu Puranas, compare favourably with the Christian Gospels, but planted the Vedas and Upanishads high up beyond the reach of any rival. There was no friend that he would not sacrifice without mercy at such a moment in the name of national defence. Such an attitude was not, perhaps, always reasonable. It was often indeed frankly unpleasant. But it was superb in the manliness that even enemies must admire. To Vivekananda, again, everything Indian was absolutely and equally sacred, – “This land to which must come all souls wending their way Godward!” his religious consciousness tenderly phrased it. At Chicago, any Indian man attending the Great World Bazaar, rich or poor, high or low, Hindu, Mohammedan, Parsi, what not, might at any moment be brought by him to his hosts for hospitality and entertainment, and they well knew that any failure of kindness on their part to the least of these would immediately have cost them his presence.

He was himself the exponent of Hinduism, but finding another Indian religionist struggling with the difficulty of presenting his case, he sat down and wrote his speech for him, making a better story for his friend's faith than its own adherent could have done!

He took infinite pains to teach European disciples to eat with their fingers, and perform the ordinary simple acts of Hindu life. “Remember, if you love India at all, you must love her *as she is*, not as you might wish her to become” he used to say. And it was this great firmness of his, standing like a rock for what actually was, that did more than any other single fact, perhaps, to open the eyes of those aliens who loved him to the

beauty and strength of that ancient poem—the common life of the common Indian people. For his own part, he was too free from the desire for approbation to make a single concession to newfangled ways. The best of every land had been offered him, but it left him still the simple Hindu of the old style, too proud of his simplicity to find any need of change. “After Ramakrishna, I follow Vidyasagar!” he exclaimed, only two days before his death, and out came the oft-repeated story of the wooden sandals coming pitter patter with the Chudder and Dhوتي, into the Viceregal Council Chamber, and the surprised “But if you didn’t want me, why did you ask me to come?” of the old Pundit, when they remonstrated.

Such points, however, are only interesting as personal characteristics. Of a deeper importance is the question as to the conviction that spoke through them. What was this? Whither did it tend? His whole life was a search for the common basis of Hinduism. To his sound judgment the idea that two pice postage, cheap travel, and a common language of affairs could create a national unity, was obviously childish and superficial. These things could only be made to serve old India’s turn if she already possessed a deep organic unity of which they might conveniently become an expression. Was such a unity existent or not? For something like eight years he wandered about the land changing his name at every village, learning of every one he met, gaining a vision as accurate and minute as it was profound and general. It was this great quest that overshadowed him with its certainty when, at the Parliament of Religions, he stood before the West and proved that Hinduism converged upon a single imperative of perfect freedom so completely as to be fully capable of intellectual aggression as any other faith.

It never occurred to him that his own people were in any respect less than the equals of any other nation whatsoever. Being well aware that religion was their national expression, he was also aware that the strength which they might display in that sphere, would be followed before long, by every other conceivable form of strength.

As a profound student of caste, – his conversation teemed with its unexpected particulars and paradoxes! – he found the key to Indian unity in its exclusiveness. Mohammedans were but a single caste of the nation. Christians another, Parsis another, and so on! It was true that of all these (with the partial exception of the last), non-belief in caste was a caste distinction. But then, the same was true of the Brahmo Samaj, and other modern sects of Hinduism. Behind all alike stood the great common facts of one soil; one beautiful old routine of ancestral civilisation; and the overwhelming necessities that must inevitably lead at last to common loves and common hates.

But he had learnt, not only the hopes and ideals of every sect and group of the Indian people, but their memories also. A child of the Hindu quarter of Calcutta returned to live by the Ganges-side, one would have supposed from his enthusiasm that he had been born, now in the Punjab, again in the Himalayas, at a third moment in Rajputana, or elsewhere. The songs of Guru Nanak alternated with those of Mira Bai and Tanasena on his lips. Stories of Prithvi Raj and Delhi jostled against those of Chitore and Pratap Singh, Shiva and Uma, Radha and Krishna, Sita-Ram and Buddha. Each mighty drama lived in a marvellous actuality, when he was the player. His whole heart and soul was a burning epic of the country, touched to an overflow of mystic passion by her very name.

To be continued in the next issue...

The Social Thought of Swami Vivekananda

THE QUESTION OF CASTE: by Swami Atmajnanananda

Continued from previous issue...

The question of caste and its relation to privilege was one with which Swami Vivekananda struggled long and hard. We can see from some of his early letters to Pramadadas Mitra, a learned scholar for whom Swamiji had great respect, how troubled Swamiji was with certain aspects of caste. One of the letters which Swamiji wrote to him from the Baranagore Math raised several questions with regard to caste, specifically concerning hereditary caste and the rights of *Sudra* to study the scriptures.

Swamiji's opinion on caste in general is not always entirely clear. In some of his writings and lectures, especially when responding to criticisms of the caste system from the West, he defends the concept of caste as representing a sensible and necessary division of labour. However, he was uncompromising with regard to his hatred of hereditary caste, of the notion that one's station in life was to be determined by birth alone rather than by one's ability or natural propensities. Though he sometimes blamed religion for the modern caste structure, Swamiji's mature opinion seems to have been that religion was not to blame and that the earliest references to caste in the Hindu scriptures do not contain the notion of hereditary caste.

It is interesting to note that many of the early questions regarding caste which Swami Vivekananda first raised in his letter to Pramadadas Mitra in 1889 are answered by Swamiji himself in his final letter to the scholar and long-time friend, written in 1897. Much time had passed since Swamiji had last written, and it is clear from the tone of the letter that their relationship had become somewhat strained. In this particular letter, Swamiji voiced what may be considered his final opinion on caste, whether hereditary or not, and on its relation to the scriptures. He wrote:

. . . the conviction is daily gaining on my mind that the idea of caste is the greatest dividing factor and the root of Maya; all caste either on the principle of birth or of merit is bondage. . . . The *Smritis* and the *Puranas* are productions of men of limited intelligence and are full of fallacies, errors, the feeling of caste, and malice . . . It is in the books written by priests that madness like that of caste are to be found, and not in books revealed from God. (*Letters*, pp. 337)

Swamiji's quarrel with the caste system centered around two separate, yet related, issues, one economic and one religious. He blamed caste, in part at least, for the social divisiveness which resulted in large disenfranchised segments of Indian society and for the grinding poverty of the masses.

He held the higher castes, particularly the Brahmins, responsible for the evils of priestcraft, for untouchability, and for their exclusive claims on spirituality and the sacred scriptures. In his reply to the address of the Maharaja of Khetri, Swamiji remarked:

This (tyranny of the upper castes) is the bane of human nature, the curse upon mankind, the root of all misery -- this inequality. This is the source of all bondage, physical, mental, and spiritual. (*CW*, IV. 329)

Swamiji reiterated the same theme in even stronger language to his brother disciple, Swami Ramakrishnananda, in a letter written from Chicago in 1894:

My brother, what experiences I have had in the South [of India], of the upper classes torturing the lower! What Bacchanalian orgies within the temples! Is it a religion that fails to remove the misery of the poor and turn men into gods! Do you think our religion is worth the name? Ours is only Don't-touchism, only "Touch me not", "Touch me not". Good heavens! A country, the big leaders of which have for the last two thousand years been only discussing whether to take food with the right hand or left, whether to take water from the right-hand side or from the left. . . if such a country does not go to ruin, what other will? . . . A country where millions of people live on flowers of the Mohua plant, and a million or two of sadhus and a hundred million or so of Brahmins suck the blood out of these poor people, without the least effort for their amelioration -- is that a country or hell? Is that a religion or the devil's dance? (CW, VI. 253)

Swami Vivekananda's quarrel with priestcraft cantered around the notion of *adhikaravada*, the restriction of the study of the Vedas and other privileges to the Brahmin caste. Swamiji seemed to have held Sankaracharya especially responsible for upholding the exclusive practices of *adhikaravada*. Time and again, in both his letters and his utterances, he refers to Sankara's narrowness and lack of sympathy, even while praising his brilliant intellect.

As early as 1889, in the aforementioned letter to Pramadadas Mitra, Swamiji raised the question of Sankara's authority for excluding *Sudras* from studying the Vedas. In several of his later letters, he also criticized Sankara for his lack of liberality, contrasting him with the compassionate Buddha. In a letter to his brother disciple, Swami Akhandananda, he wrote:

What Buddha did was to break wide open the gates of that very religion which was confined in the Upanishads to a particular caste . . . His greatness lies in his unrivalled sympathy. The high orders of *samādhi* etc., that lent gravity to his religion, are almost all there in the Vedas; what are absent there are his intellect and heart, which have never since been paralleled throughout the history of the world . . . The religion of Buddha has reared itself on the *Upanishad*, and upon that also the philosophy of Sankara. Only Sankara had not the slightest bit of Buddha's wonderful heart, dry intellect merely! For fear of the Tantras, for fear of the mob, in his attempt to cure a boil, he amputated the very arm itself. (CW, VI. 225-27)

And in the course of a conversation with his disciple, Sharat Chandra Chakravarty, Swamiji said:

Sankara's intellect was sharp like a razor. He was a good arguer and a scholar, no doubt of that, but he had no great liberality; his heart too seems to have been like that. Besides, he used to take great pride in his Brahmanism -- much like a southern Brahmin of the priest class, you may say. How he has defended in his commentary on the Vedanta Sutras that the non-Brahmin castes will not attain to a supreme knowledge of Brahman! . . . But look at Buddha's heart! -- Ever ready to give his own life to save the life of even a kid -- what to speak of *bahujanahitāya bahujanasukhāya* -- For the welfare of the many, for the happiness of the many! See what a large-heartedness—what a compassion. (CW, VII. 117-18).

Human Excellence

- lecture by Swami Ranganathananda

When Swamiji said – ‘if you can prepare, what they call in North India, the chillum, that Hukka there is a way of preparing a Hukka. How to put the tambaku in it, how much water to be put inside? It is very carefully to be done. If you can do that well, then you can do meditation also well. In small actions, you show your excellence, and then you show your excellence in big actions’. We neglect the small, and we never achieve the big. Because we think – “in these small things I can be careless, I will be careful when the big things will come”. Neither here nor there – we become excellent. So Swamiji said – “even the little things that you do, do it with the whole concentration. Your whole mind must be there. Then only work becomes excellent”.

That teaching came to me quite young. Therefore when I was in Mysore, working in the kitchen for e.g. for six years – washing the dishes. That philosophy always prompted me for excellence in the kitchen. Every thing must be clean, timely. Of course what you cook must be tasteful. That is called excellence in cooking. I took that message into the kitchen, because Swamiji said it. Sweeping, I was so particular that when I sweep a floor, it must be clean, nothing should be scattered here and there. Sometimes I was watching the airports, that lady comes to sweep there. Her mind is nowhere there, in her salary only her mind is. So you can see the dirt is still there, but in western countries I didn't see so. They are sure to see that the place is clean. What is sweeping for? To make the place clean! We do it more as a lazy work, without caring to see the result of that work! What a long way we have to go? Before we achieve human excellence, this stress on the little things that you do – nobody is watching you and do it well. That is the foundation of all greatness.

Swamiji has given one criterion of Human greatness. He says – “In the little things that you do, un-observed by anybody else, if you are excellent, then you are truly excellent. When people are watching and praising you and you do well that is not the true test of excellence. No body is watching you, what you do in the most private aspect of your life, there if you are excellent, you will be excellent everywhere”. He gave an example – Any fool can stand on the platform and deliver a lecture if a thousand people are going to clap hands to praise him. Then he gets great enthusiasm. Nobody is going to watch you, nobody is going to clap hands, and then you still speak well, that is your real standard of excellence there. So one such guidance Swamiji gives on the subject of Excellence in work to all our people.

Un-noticed, un-observed by anybody, are you doing your work well? Is it well done? That must be our consideration. The humblest of work! Washing a vessel, making it clean. What is washing for? To making it clean. Is it clean? Our older generation, especially our women had that wonderful quality. What-ever they do, they do it excellent! Even in a poor home you go, their brass vessels, how clean, how beautifully organized and arranged! There you can see excellence there! They are not highly educated, but work excellence came to them. How? They put their soul into their work.

A sort of dreamy type of work cannot create excellence. Our people have to learn it a lot! I am seeing it all over India and I am happy to say by and large our girls in schools and colleges have more interest in that kind of excellence than our boys. There is so much slipshod work, when boys do. The girls have yet maintained some standard of work. So this is the basis of excellence in work – intelligence is needed, that intelligence must be yoked to your muscular system. Then a high motivation coming from personal honour and dignity, which is so little available in our society. When somebody is supervising my work, I may be nice; nobody is supervising, I become slipshod. There you can see want of self-respect, want of personal honour.

‘Why should anybody supervise my work? I am not a thief, I am not a lazy person, I am not a cheat!’ Now, these thoughts must come and inspire our minds. Have self-respect. I don’t want somebody to watch over me. Now, when I see people working in Japan and all that, they don’t work, because somebody is watching. They have tremendous self-respect. This is my work, my honour – that attitude alone can produce excellence in work. So in every department, in the most humble homely duties to administration, this concept of Human Excellence must inspire our nation today. I must be excellent in what I do. A clerk is doing clerical work in the office; he can be excellent in that work. First of all, that work excellence, and the work excellence will be better, if that human motivation is also added to it. Then supreme excellence will come. Otherwise work excellence can come, merely on the basis of our intelligence, talents and a spirit of self-respect. But the supreme excellence will come only when a human concern enters into my work. A mother is bathing a baby. She can be excellent in that work, because she knows the art and she has a mother’s love. That makes it excellent. Similarly in our work for society in the department of administration or in politics, professional departments, everywhere so many values have to find a confluence to make for excellence in work.

First value as I told is intelligence. We must exercise our intelligence, to show excellence in work. Second, self-respect and a sense of personal honour. Thirdly comes the human concern. When all these join together we get excellence in work. But large sections of people do not think in these lines in India!

“One has to suffer the consequences of one’s deeds. But by repeating the Name of God, you can lessen its intensity. If you were destined to have a wound as wide as a ploughshare, you will get a pinprick at least. The effect of karma can be counteracted to a great extent by Japa and austerities.”

— Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi

“Unselfishness is more paying, only people have not patience to practise it.”

— Swami Vivekananda

An Incident from Mahabharata

Bhima meets Hanuman

Narayana Ashrama is a holy place in the Himalayas. Many sages spent their lives there in meditation. The Pandavas went to this place during their exile.

The sages received them happily and invited them to spend some days there. Yudhisthira accepted their invitation.

One day Draupadi saw a lotus floating in the river. It was a thousand petalled lotus with very sweet fragrance. Draupadi approached Bhima. She showed that flower to him and said, "Can you please get me more of such lotuses? We shall worship the sages with these". Hearing Draupadi's simple request, Bhima immediately agreed.

Accordingly he set out in search of that lotus. He walked for long. He saw many fragrant flowers but he still did not find the lotus he was searching for. On the way, in a banana grove, Lord Hanuman sat in ecstasy repeating the Lord's name. He was Bhima's elder brother. The wild animals ran helter-skelter on hearing the footsteps of Bhima. Hanuman understood that his younger brother was approaching him.

Hanuman decided to have some fun at his brother's expense.

He spread out his tail and sat blocking Bhima's path. Bhima came up to him. Hanuman pretended not to know him and asked, "Who are you? And why have you come here?"

Bhima replied, "I am Bhima, the son of Kunti".

Hanuman replied, "You cannot go any farther. This is my place. You can eat some fruits here and depart. Please turn back and do not disturb me."

Bhima was a little irritated and pressed Hanuman to let him move forward. At this, Hanuman told him, "I am an old monkey. I cannot move. If you can please lift my tail and place it by the side, then you can go forward."

Bhima carelessly pushed the tail with his leg. He could not move the monkey's tail. He then tried with both his hands. Still he could not move the tail. He put in all his strength and tried. He still did not succeed.

Bhima realized that he was not dealing with an ordinary monkey. He told Hanuman, "Respected Sir, please reveal to me who you are? You must be a great person".

Hanuman saw that Bhima's pride was humbled. He revealed himself. "I am Hanuman your elder brother. The pond where you can find your flowers is very near. Go collect the flowers."

Bhima was happy to have met his brother. He begged his forgiveness and requested Hanuman to show his Vishwarupa.

After much pleading from Bhima, Hanuman revealed his cosmic form that extended beyond the sky. Bhima bowed to him in reverence and Hanuman blessed him and said, "Bhima! We should show respect to old people. May the Lord help you in your efforts!"

His pride humbled, Bhima collected the flowers and returned to Draupadi.

One may gain political and social independence, but if he is a slave to his passions and desires, he cannot feel the pure joy of real freedom.

- Swami Vivekananda

Glory of the Gita: Bhagavad Gita for Executives

Presented here are eight slokas , translated by Dr Manohar Abhay , an ardent devotee of Gita. The exposition shall make you familiar with the title and the lesson learnt from each sloka .

Virtues of Friends

O, best among the Brahmans, for your information, I shall now name those distinguished commanders of my army so that you could also know about them. (1-7)

(In my army) your venerable self and Bhishma and Karna and also Krpa ,who is ever victorious in battle, and similar to him are Asvathama, Vikarma and the son of Saumadatta (Bhurishrava) and Jayadratha;(1-8)

Also armed with various weapons and missiles, there are many other valiant heroes highly skilled in warfare, who are prepared to sacrifice their lives for me. (1-9)

Lesson: [Always appreciate the qualities of your friends](#)

Arrogance

Well defended by Bhishma, our army is invincible (unlimited) where as Pandavas' power is limited, although that too is well defended by Bhima. (1-10)

Lesson: [An arrogant person over estimates his power/potential.](#)

Old Guards

Therefore, occupying your respective positions on all fronts, all of you kindly protect Bhishma alone from all sides. (1-11)

Lesson: [Always help and protect your old guard, from all sides irrespective of his prowess.](#)

Inspiration

(Then) the glorious grandsire, the eldest of the Kuru-dynasty (Bhishma), bringing joy to your son (Duryodhana) loudly blew his conch which sounded aloud a lions roar. (1-12)

Lesson: [Speak aloud \(create high sounding voice\) when you wish to inspire your fellow beings.](#)

Fellow-beings' Nature

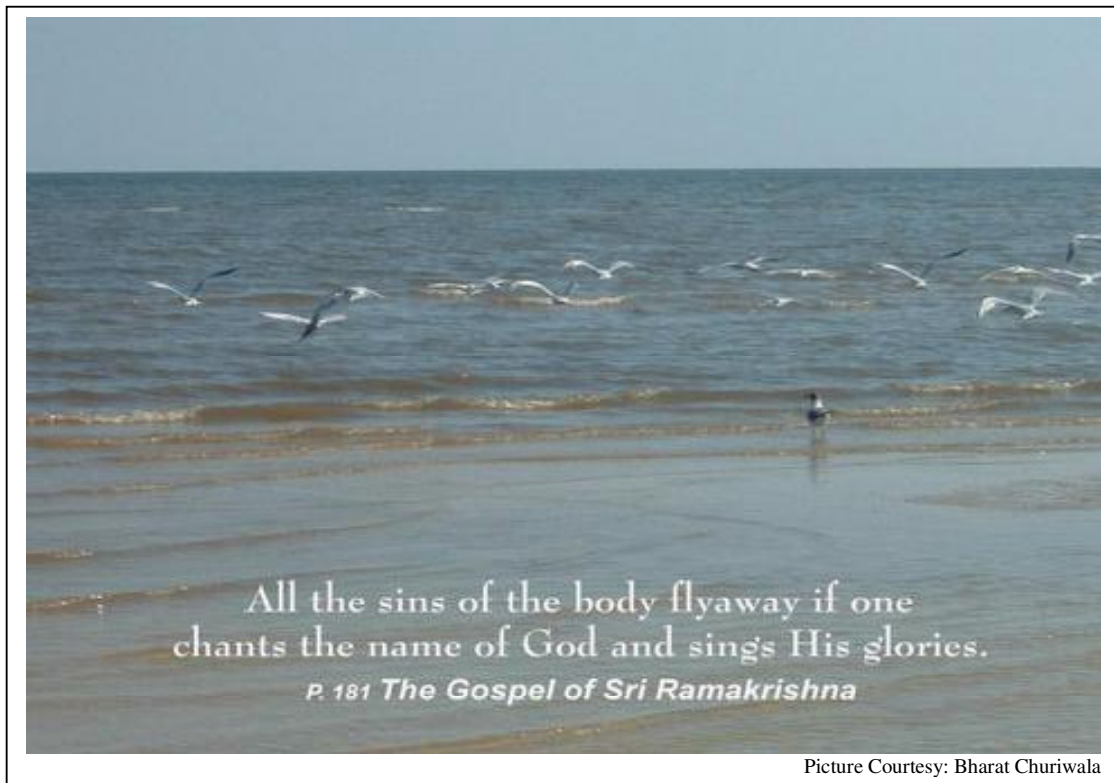
Thereafter, conchs, kettledrums, cymbals and tabours, trumpets and cow-horns suddenly blared forth together and the commotion was tumultuous. (1-13)

Lesson: [Fellow-beings imitate and follow their role models.](#)

Response

After that, Madhava (Lord Krishna) and the son of Pandu (Arjuna) seated in a grand chariot yoked with white horses blew their divine conchs. (1-14)

Lesson: [Brave persons respond to challenges with divinity and boldness.](#)



God's name destroys sin:

NEIGHBOUR: "Sir, we are sinners. What will happen to us?"

MASTER: "All the sins of the body flyaway, if one chants the name of God and sings His glories. The birds of sin dwell in the tree of the body. Singing the name of God is like clapping your hands. As, at a clap of the hands, the birds in the tree flyaway, so do our sins disappear at the chanting of God's name and glories.

"Again, you find that the water of a reservoir, dug in a meadow, is evaporated by the heat of the sun. Likewise, the water of the reservoir of sin is dried up by the singing of the name and glories of God.

"You must practise it every day. The other day, at the circus, I saw a horse running at top speed, with an Englishwoman standing on one foot on its back. How much she must have practised to acquire that skill!

"Weep at least once to see God.

"These, then, are the two means: practice and passionate attachment to God, that is to say, restlessness of the soul to see Him."

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|| Hari Om ||