

Swami Vivekananda and the Freedom Movement

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An old Sanskrit proverb explains freedom as "*Swa atmam pradhanyam Asya ithi swatantrata*" which means freedom is an important ingredient to mankind perhaps as salt is to food. Freedom is necessary and unavoidable.

A progressive world needs a free society which allows its people to be free thinkers, who have their own interest and are independent to act with clarity on it without being bounded by major social restrictions. Gandhi in his book "*Hind Swaraj*" wrote that the idea of swaraj is about freedom and self-control. It can only be achieved when we learn to govern ourselves. According to him, Swaraj is not just about freedom, it's about reclaiming your lost self-esteem, being responsible and taking control over yourself from the institutions who were hell-bent on destroying your human qualities.

Independence isn't about just ruling. It's a strategy for the nation to achieve self-determination like an individual. Which can only be possible when it's self-governed. The freedom of the state is only complete when its citizens get the right to govern the affairs of their nation.

Western Lexicographers define "nationalists" as the people who favour, dominate and strive for the freedom and unity of a nation. Nationalism is emotional, it's a connection between the people and the country they live in.

Caste and Politics are the two powerful factors that hinder the growth of a society. They were the two major negative influences on society in pre-independent India. Together they had made a barrier of injustice and inequality which divided people. So the first step towards independence was to overcome these social barriers by removing them from society. Swami Vivekananda's contribution to the freedom struggle was this humongous task of removing these dividing factors.

Religious Awakening

Vivekananda believed that spirituality of India was sedated and it was very important to wake it up before embarking on a journey of political freedom or any other form of liberation. He narrated verses from our ancient texts like the Upanishads and encouraged the people to not to give up until you wake up, enlightened and ready to achieve your goals.

Hinduism during his time was home to social restrictions, taboos and constraints imposed by the class divisions. These imposed restrictions on some sections of people created social inequality. While some people were considered inferior and others as superior. The meaning of freedom differed between every class of society.

Swamiji was different, he believed these divides shouldn't exist and only by giving the inferior people their rights and uplifting them to the same level of freedom that superiors wanted, it would in turn, invoke the feeling of being a part of a nation in them. The confidence that they gained through this positive change in society brought them to the frontlines of freedom struggle, actively involved in it.

India is also home to many religions. It was another challenge in front of Swami Vivekananda to unite them for the fight for Freedom. People from different beliefs often clashed with each other. He decided to enlighten the Hindus, who were the majority using verses from Bhagavad Gita and Upanishads, which talked about the idea of "one god" and people may call it by many names but the wise know how to love and respect. Thus, the Hindus shall respect and love all other religions as they love Hinduism.

Political Awakening

A nationalist is a very emotional being. It was the collective emotional response of a group of nationalist that united them to fight for the freedom of their country in the 19th century.

Many national liberations movements were happening across the world during that period. The collective goal of these independence movements was to achieve a self-determined nation which values the voice of its people and administer and protects their interests. His idea of the right to self-determination became a political phenomenon which resonated with the agents of nationalism. It became clear that once people realise that they are the subject of oppression they would fight to rise from it by organising together and making their voices heard. Democracy and equality became a need of the hour for the nationalists. It became very clear that the social and political conditions that existed in India were the root of all problems and the colonists were merely taking advantage of it. Historians of the modern-day point out that from 1858, India was preparing to be under British rule willingly.

Many of Swami Vivekananda's contemporary men saw the Brits ruling as beneficial to India. But he saw it as the rule of the Visayas who have come to brutalise and exploit our motherland. For him, any reconciliation with the Brits was out of the question. Vivekananda inspired the Congress to be less tolerant and rise above the oppression by the British and demand freedom as a right. Gandhi believed the partition of Bengal paved way to the fall of the British Empire.

Vivekananda stood for the idea of equality, freedom and social upliftment. During this time Congress was the party of elites and for the elites. They had no connections with a large number of the poor and downtrodden of the Indian society.

Corruption reigned supreme and Vivekananda wanted to eradicate it from the source. He described corruption as a plague which stops a nation's ability to develop. He believed education

was the way out of all these problems. He wanted people to be educated in the field of Science, Technology, Social Sciences and economics. He believed along with these people needed faith in God and being morally corruption-free. He also wanted everybody to learn the values of self-sacrifice, honesty and selflessness. He called the youth to not work for the British instead for the social development of India.

Surendranath Banerjee, a moderate leader from the Congress wrote in Bengali that " the history of a country lies in the history of the great personalities of that country". Swami Vivekananda and Shri Ramakrishna are two cornerstones of an educated contemporary India. He also defined Swami as a "Patriot". Another moderate leader Shri Gopalakrishnan Gokhale took up his philosophy of social upliftment as a personal goal.

Vivekananda played a major role in introducing "Socialism" in Indian politics. Although he wasn't the biggest admirer of socialism. He described it as "living on a half-full stomach is better than living in hunger".

The revolutionary Subhash Chandra Bose was an admirer of Swami Vivekananda's philosophies. His Indian National Army (INA) was based on the philosophies of unity, sincerity and compliance. Bose described the Swami as someone who always thought of others before himself and someone who had no mercy for the oppressor but at the same time was as innocent as a little child.

Mahatma Gandhi was another nationalist who was influenced by Vivekananda. Gandhi famously addressed the poor as " Harijans" inspired by Vivekananda's idea of calling the poor as "Narayana". There's a reflection of Swami's ideas in Gandhian philosophies. He famously said I oppose any religious doctrine that does not appeal to reason and is in conflict with morality came from Vivekananda's ideas about religious harmony and practice of Vedanta.

The first Prime Minister, Minister of India, Jawahar Lal Nehru was also an admirer of Vivekananda. During the Indo-china war in 1968, Nehru addressed the youth by quoting Vivekananda. He admired his spirit and energy. His ability to overcome any obstacle with wit and rationality. His daughter and his successor as Prime Minister Indira Gandhi declared the birthday of Vivekananda January 12th as National Youth Day. Dr S Radhakrishnan described Vivekananda as " the soul of this country".

Bal Gangadhar Tilak in his celebrated publication "Maratha" called Vivekananda as "Father of Indian Freedom Movement". On August 18, 1916, Shri Aurobindo wrote about him for the Commonweal newspaper which was run by Annie Basant at that time. He called Vivekananda as a great prophet and preacher of Modern Indian Nationalism. His prelude to India's Independence movement was compared to the mighty French Revolution by Rousseau and Karl Marx who served as an inspiration to the Russian and Chinese revolutions.

Notes:

- ❖ Amarasimhan "Amarakosham" P. 6,7,8, NCS 1958 Edition.
- ❖ www.mk Gandhi.org/man.html dated 20/12/2012

- ❖ wikipedia.org/nationality.html dated 21/12/2012
- ❖ RC Majumdar, H.C.R Rachaudhuri and Kalikinkardatta P. 283
- ❖ Shankariprasad Basu ‘Vivekananda Samakalika Bharatvarsha’ Vol.III P.32
- ❖ Vivekananda The Great Spiritual Teacher, P. 317

