

Swamiji's Message for the East and the West

Ann Louise Bardach, who is working on a biography of Vivekananda, wrote in a recent article in the New York Times:

“You are not your body,” he often reminded Americans, who tend to prefer “doing” over “being.” More distressing, for some, was his other message: “You are not your mind.”

‘Yoga to the man who most famously delivered its message to America meant just one thing: “realizing God.” He abhorred channeling, séances and past-life hunts as diversionary....

‘Lacking a fig leaf of false modesty, he informed one Brooklyn audience, “I have a message to the West as Buddha had a message to the East.” ’

‘To be good and do good – that is the whole of religion’, said Vivekananda. So, *doing* has an important place in his scheme of Religion, though second to *being*. ‘Being and becoming’ is the central message of Vivekananda. To him realizing God means being one with God and then becoming one with all, and that is the sole purpose of *yoga*. He insisted, ‘The living God is within you’, just as Christ said, ‘The kingdom of God is within you.’ Many Indians, and not only Americans, have grave misconceptions in these areas. Some people think Vivekananda stands for *doing* NGO-style social service and *yoga* is merely for physical fitness. The ‘Indian Baba industry’, a term coined by a columnist recently, has added to this confusion by placing Patanjali in the midst of the multi-crore fitness business. For similar reasons, Bardach has taken on the ‘annual \$6 billion industry’ of so-called *yoga* in the US.

His message to the West is a modern representation of the eternal message of India, which the Buddha preached more than two thousand five hundred years back. It is the eternal message of *Vedanta* – the mighty proclamation of the glory of Man. And Vivekananda made it his life’s mission to preach the lofty ideal to the people of the world, who have hypnotized themselves into believing they are but ordinary mortals. As he said about Buddha, he himself also ‘was the Washington of the religious world; he conquered a throne only to give it to the world, as Washington did to the American people. He sought nothing for himself.’ (*Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda, Vol.7, p.59*) He said about his mission: ‘Shankara left this Advaita philosophy (of Vedanta) in the hills and forests, while I have come to bring it out of those places and scatter it broadcast before the workaday world and society. The lion-roar of Advaita must resound in every hearth and home, in meadows and groves, over hills and plains.’ (*CW, Vol.7, p.162*)

However, the message of Vivekananda was not for the West alone, but perhaps more for the East. He started the Introduction to his unfinished book, *India's Message To The World*, with these words: ‘Bold has been my message to the people of the West, bolder is my message to you, my beloved countrymen.’ (*CW, Vol.4, p.312*)

His message for India was futuristic, as he explained: ‘The message of ancient India to new Western nations I have tried my best to voice – ill done or well done the future is sure to show; but the mighty voice of the same future is already sending forward soft but distinct

murmurs, gaining strength as the days go by, the message of *India that is to be* to *India as she is at present*.' (CW, Vol.4, p.312) [Emphasis added] '*India that is to be*' spoke through him to '*India as she is at present*'.

Ramakrishna-Vivekananda was the dawn of a future India. The future must certainly be an unbroken continuity of the ancient through the present. But she has to surpass all of the past. As Swamiji said, 'There were many good things in the ancient times, but there were bad things too. The good things are to be retained, but the *India that is to be*, the future India, must be much greater than ancient India.' (CW, Vol.6, p.318)

When he said that the *Satya-yuga* had arrived with the advent of Sri Ramakrishna, he was actually depicting his vision of the immense possibilities hidden in the nucleus. The nucleus holds in its bosom the whole of the future, which is to blossom in due course of time, for the good of the world. And what is the sign of *satya-yuga*? Onward movement, as the *Vedas* hold. It is not a mythological division of time for him. 'Onward and forward to the breach, you are irresistible', commanded Vivekananda. (CW, Vol.4, p.369)

It was a revolutionary spirit that worked through him, leading to the germination of a new India. It had to be new altogether, and so the historical forces worked. India had to cope with the all-conquering Western influence, to hold on to her own characteristics. She had her hoary culture, her religion, her *Vedas*, which she could not afford to lose, except to her own peril. Like her God incarnating again and again in new forms to reinvigorate her national life, her religion and *Vedas* also had to reincarnate in new forms to serve the necessities of this era. Vivekananda, therefore, declared, 'Now we have a new India, with its new God, new religion, and new *Vedas*.' And he lamented, 'When, O Lord, shall our land be free from this eternal dwelling upon the past?' (CW, Vol.7, p.496)

But, the road to the new is not through destruction of everything old, but through evolution of social life. He addressed the leaders of the then reform movements and explained his approach to change, 'To the reformers I will point out that I am a greater reformer than any one of them. They want to reform only little bits. I want root-and-branch reform. Where we differ is in the method. Theirs is the method of destruction, mine is that of construction. I do not believe in reform; I believe in growth.' (CW, Vol.3, p.213)

Society is like an organic being, not like machines, which can be dismantled and rebuilt at will. It must grow from within. For growth it requires nutrition, that is, assimilation of strength-giving ideas.

Swamiji clearly saw the importance of economic factors that guide the common people and said, 'This animal called man has some religious influence, but he is guided by economy. Individuals are guided by something else, but the mass of mankind never made a move unless economy was [involved].' (CW, Vol.1, p.454) Yet, right ideas alone can provide nutrition and make men of us. He said in a famous lecture, *My Plan of Campaign*, in Madras in 1897, 'It is a man-making religion that we want. It is man-making theories that we want. It is man-making education all round that we want.' (CW, Vol.3, p.224)

It is a man-making process which alone can change the fabrics of the nation. All changes, in the final analysis, depend on the goodness of man. The economic fortune of the common people depends wholly on it. If we can increase the number of good people, we will be able to prevent problems by reducing the number of unscrupulous people. Thus, we will also cure many existing problems by increasing the number of good people in politics,

government, administration, police, etc., who would control the remaining unscrupulous people. But it has to be 'dynamic goodness', which means feeling and working for others.

Traditional religions cannot be the source of this dynamic goodness. For, 'Religions of the world have become lifeless mockeries. What the world wants is character. The world is in need of those whose life is one burning love, selfless. That love will make every word tell like thunderbolt.' 'The earth's bravest and best will have to sacrifice themselves for the good of many, for the welfare of all. Buddhas by the hundred are necessary with eternal love and pity.' (*CW, Vol.7, p.501*)

Thus, he wanted to get young men and women, ready to sacrifice their life for the people. He made a detailed, practical plan on national lines for spreading man-making education throughout the nation, and expected bands of young men and women of future generations to implement it.

In the past education was monopolized by the upper classes. The future is not for them, but for the people. For, education will be disseminated and whoever was let down, exploited, and oppressed in the past will come up with a deep sense of human dignity. Thus will New India arise. He called forth:

'Let New India arise in your place. Let her arise – out of the peasants' cottage, grasping the plough; out of the huts of the fisherman, the cobbler, and the sweeper. Let her spring from the grocer's shop, from beside the oven of the fritter-seller. Let her emanate from the factory, from marts, and from markets. Let her emerge from groves and forests, from hills and mountains....' (*CW, Vol.7, p.327*)

He called upon the youths to take up his flag and march on. Young men of India, listen to his call:

'Let us all work hard, my brethren; this is no time for sleep. On our work depends the coming of *the India of the future*. She is there ready waiting. She is only sleeping. Arise and awake and see her seated here on her eternal throne, rejuvenated, more glorious than she ever was – this motherland of ours.' (*CW, Vol.3, p.154*)