

## **Value of Freedom**

In January 1900, when Swami Vivekananda was at Pasadena in California, US, he was requested to speak on his life and mission. He delivered the lecture on 27 January. He said, 'India is no longer a political power; it is an enslaved race. Indians have no say, no voice in their own government; they are three hundred millions of slaves – nothing more! The average income of a man in India is two shillings a month. The common state of the vast mass of the people is starvation, so that, with the least decrease in income, millions die.' (*Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda, Vol.8, p.74*)

He knew that political changes would follow the tidal waves of spirituality initiated by Sri Ramakrishna. He wrote in an article, 'We have seen throughout the history of India, a spiritual upheaval is almost always succeeded by a political unity extending over more or less area of the continent, which in its turn helps to strengthen the spiritual aspiration that brings it to being.' (*CW, Vol.6, p.166*)

In the following decade political movements began, which aimed first at partial self-governance and later at complete independence. The freedom fighters dreamt of a democratic India where all people would have proper food, education, shelter, medical care, and, above all, dignity. Their heroic fight culminated in the struggle of the Indian National Army. The story of the INA electrified the nation. The Indian officers and soldiers in the British Army and Navy could no more remain loyal to the British Crown. The British realized they could no longer hold on to the Empire with their help. After the World War II the international equations also changed. So, the British were eager to transfer power to Indians and leave. The Indian leadership was just not prepared to run the affairs of the country, which is so vast and beset with so many problems. They agreed to the Mountbatten Plan to divide the Motherland! The vivisection has caused profuse bleeding ever since. Around that time the huge British Empire was breaking into pieces, as predicted by Swami Vivekananda. Many countries became free in the following decades. Swamiji foresaw the days:

Then came the day when work bore fruit,  
And worship, love, and sacrifice,  
Fulfilled, accepted, and complete.  
Then thou, propitious, rose to shed  
The light of Freedom on mankind.  
Move on, O Lord, in thy resistless path!  
Till thy high noon o'erspreads the world.  
Till every land reflects thy light,  
Till men and women, with uplifted head,  
Behold their shackles broken, and  
Know, in springing joy, their life renewed! (*CW, Vol.5, p.440*)

But, Swamiji knew that it would be difficult for our people to appreciate the value of freedom. They were poor and illiterate. 'Their extreme poverty is one of the causes why the Chinese and the Indians have remained in a state of mummified civilisation.' (*CW, Vol.5, p.7*)

‘And the bigger the nation, the more unwieldy it is. Born, as it were, a disorganised mob, they cannot combine.’ (*CW, Vol.3, p.300*)

The educated few, in general, who would lead the nation, were not ready to make sacrifices ‘for the common weal’. Rather there was every possibility that they would enjoy undue privileges at the cost of the poor. Swamiji wrote to the youths of India, ‘None deserves liberty who is not ready to give liberty. Suppose the English give over to you all the power. Why, the powers that be then, will hold the people down, and let them not have it. Slaves want power to make slaves.’ (*CW, Vol.4, p.368*)

The upper classes of India are not sensitive to the woes of the poor. In 1893 he wrote in a letter, ‘Trust not the so-called rich, they are more dead than alive.’ ‘Their sleep is never disturbed, their nice little brown studies of lives never rudely shocked by the wail of woe, of misery, of degradation, and poverty, that has filled the Indian atmosphere – the result of centuries of oppression.’ (*CW, Vol.5, p.16*)

So, Swamiji suggested a master plan for rousing the youths by spreading *man-making* ideas first and then awakening the masses through education. He called upon the youths to build life and character for the sake of the Motherland. Character is the core of the religion he taught. And he warned, ‘In India, religious life forms the centre, the keynote of the whole music of national life; and if any nation attempts to throw off its national vitality – the direction which has become its own through the transmission of centuries.... And, therefore, if you succeed in the attempt to throw off your religion and take up either politics, or society, or any other thing as your centre, as the vitality of your national life, the result will be that you will become extinct.’ (*CW, Vol.3, p.220*)

We, as a nation, adore him, but have not paid heed to his advices. Hardly anybody considered character building of youths seriously. Politics has been offered as the panacea of all ills, instead of education, and everything everywhere has been systematically politicized and corrupted. We have depended on the rich for development and expected the riches would some day trickle down from the multi-storey mansions to the shanties of the poor. The masses remain mostly illiterate even today. That explains why sixty four years after independence we are in such a mess, why we are at the 67<sup>th</sup> rank among 81 poorest countries in the Global Hunger Index Report 2011, which tags our hunger situation as ‘alarming’.

Let us, even now, listen to the voice of Reason, the voice of Heart – the voice of the Prophet. Let us identify and follow the true Leader and plunge into action.