

Swami Vivekananda's Vision of New India

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Abstract

Introduction: Swami Vivekananda's vision, teachings and personality have different dimensions, both at the individual level and at the societal/national level.

Objective: An attempt is made in this paper to elucidate Swamiji's vision on the important characteristic features that lead to evolving holistic individuals, based on the import of the Upanishads, who would be competent to undertake the task of building a new India.

Discussion: In the process of bringing out vital characteristics that evolves holistic individuals, we are given to understand Swamiji's perspectives regarding (1) developing faith in oneself (2) understanding the Upanishads (3) education for all (4) women empowerment (5) upliftment of the masses (6) service (7) evolvement of a well-balanced society, and (8) developing organizational capacity.

Conclusion: We are able to understand Swamiji's vision of redefining the quality of human life and evolving holistic individuals, based on the Upanishads, at the individual and societal/national level, for the regeneration of a new India. We are given to perceive Swamiji as a practical Vedantin and as a visionary par excellence.

Key words: Swami Vivekananda, New India, Swamiji, Upanishads, Holistic Individuals, Education.

INTRODUCTION

Swami Vivekananda, the modern Seer, envisaged a dynamic, vibrant, holistic and a glorious future of our country. Swamiji's vision, teachings and personality have different dimensions, both at the individual level as well as at the societal/national level. For instance, one may understand Swamiji as a great Jagat-guru, a world teacher-par-excellence of the Vedanta/Upanishads, whose message of salvation is of world-wide import and makes no distinction of country, nation and religion. One may perceive Swamiji, the practical Vedantin, as a great leader-par-excellence, spearheading the application of the Upanishadic import for the resurgence of modern India and giving a clarion call, to his people, to work for the nation's upliftment.

Swamiji's vision covers the entire gamut of human existence, be it at the individual level or at the societal/national level. It is common knowledge that the quality of a nation depends upon the quality of its inhabitants. It is a group of individuals who makes a society and a group of society makes a nation. Therefore, for the regeneration of a nation, the first cardinal condition lies in regeneration of the individuals of the nation.

Swamiji, taking into account this dynamic relationship between individuals and nation, have identified important characteristic features, based on the import of the Upanishads, for the evolvement of a positive, dynamic and all-round developed (ie) holistic individuals, who would be competent to undertake the task of building a self-reliant India.

Let us proceed to understand Swamiji's vision on the vital characteristics that evolves holistic individuals.

(I) Developing Faith in Oneself

The first factor Swamiji points out is to develop Shraddha (faith) in ourselves. He reasons that it is due to lack of faith in ourselves that our country was under foreign rule for more than thousand years. Swamiji proclaims, "The idea of true shraddha must be brought back once more to us, the faith in our own selves must be reawakened, and, then only, all the problems which face our country will gradually be solved by ourselves" ¹.

Swamiji states that faith in oneself is the one single motive power behind the lives of all great men and women. ² Faith in oneself enables individuals to become great and strong as it leads to the overall (material, intellectual and spiritual) development of individuals. A man of faith can successfully face any challenge and can perform many noble deeds.

Swamiji points out that weakness (the opposite of faith in oneself) is the root cause for all sins and evils in the world. Weakness is also the source of all selfishness. ³ Self-weakness creates a sense of frustration, alienation and drags the individual to crave for constant flattery. It makes a man feel inadequate and insecure. In order to reassure oneself, man is often pushed to exploit and dominate others.

The remedy for weakness and lack of faith in oneself does not lie in brooding over it, but in the contemplation of strength and faith. But, from where does one get enough strength and faith to overcome weakness and lack of faith?

(II) Understanding the Upanishads

Swamiji points out that faith in ourselves would emerge within us with the study/understanding of the Upanishads, the treasure-house of our Culture. In Swamiji's own words, "If there is one word that you find coming out like a bomb from the Upanishads, bursting like a bomb-shell upon masses of ignorance, it is the word fearlessness, and the only religion that ought to be taught, is the religion of fearlessness"⁴.

Further, Swamiji points out that the Upanishads brings in the understanding of Oneness of all beings. According to him, the Vedanta, as reflected in the Mahavakyas, points out that, "You and I and everything in the universe are that Absolute"⁵ for "He is the Oneness, the Unity of all, the Reality of all life and all existence"⁶. Swamiji states that the understanding of oneness provides an individual with tremendous strength and energy. In his own words, "The first step in getting strength is to uphold the Upanishads, and believe I am the Soul....What can we not do? Everything can be done by us; we all have the same glorious Soul, let us believe in it"⁷.

Further, Swamiji states that the understanding that we are the Atman, that is deathless, ever-free and pure by nature, would provide us with immense strength and self-belief. Swamiji proclaims, "Teach yourselves, teach everyone his real nature, call upon the sleeping Soul and see how it awakes. Power will come, glory will come, goodness will come, purity will come, and everything that is excellent will come when this sleeping Soul is roused to self-conscious activity"⁸.

The natural tendency of an individual to feel weak when confronted with life's problems can be overcome by the message of strength arising from the Upanishads. This inner strength would enable an individual to overcome not only all temptations regarding unproductive and immoral goals in life, but also the use of questionable means to achieve his legitimate aspirations of life. Such a man can never be led astray by the undesirable and destructive forces operating in society.

(III) Providing Education for all

Swamiji perceived education as a tool for the upliftment of the masses and to solve all social evils.

Swamiji points out that education in modern India is provided towards satisfaction at the physical level, but starving at the cultural and spiritual levels. He envisaged a spiritual education combined with secular education that would lead to the overall development of individuals. Such an education is life-building, man-making and character-making assimilation of ideas.

According to Swamiji, education must lead to a systematic development of the mind through concentration and detachment. In his own words, “The power of concentration is the only key to the treasure-house of knowledge”⁹. He further states that, “We must learn not only to attach the mind to one thing exclusively, but also to detach it at a moment’s notice and place it upon something else. Those two should be developed together to make it safe”¹⁰.

According to Swamiji, such an education would lead to the upliftment of the masses from the social evils of exploitation, superstitious beliefs, caste problem and ignoring women empowerment.

Let us briefly see two important social issues addressed by Swamiji, as under

(a) Women Empowerment

Swamiji believed in giving equal opportunities for both men and women. He pointed out that unless the women are raised, given education and freedom, there is no salvation for India. He was against men interfering in women’s issues. In Swamiji’s own words, “Our right of interference is limited entirely to giving education. Women must be put in a position to solve their own problems in their own way. No one can or ought to do this for them. Our Indian women are as capable of doing it as any in this world.”¹¹

Swamiji has faith in the capabilities of women, provided they are properly educated. He believed in the self-respect and self-dignity of women and wanted no man to trample upon it, be it in the guise of protection or in the guise of reformation.

An important point to be noted here is that while recognizing the equality of men and women on the spiritual plane, Swamiji however, do recognize that man and woman have their own distinct natures on a psycho-physical plane and that each must grow and function according to his or her nature, in order to attain fulfillment in their respective roles-personal or social.

(b) Upliftment of the masses

According to Swamiji, education paves the way for gainful employment, self-respect of the masses, thereby, leading to their upliftment. He proclaims that providing education in the form of service would lead to the upliftment of the masses. In Swamiji’s own words, “The only service to be done for our lower classes is to give them education, to develop their lost individuality.”¹²

In this context, Swamiji’s perception of service must be understood. Swamiji repeatedly underlines the fact that one cannot help anyone but can only serve others. The very idea of helping others is an egoistic one. Service must be undertaken with a right attitude. Swamiji proclaims, “the right attitude behind service emerges from the ethical understanding of the Vedantic oneness, which enables an individual to realize that the poor and the rich, the saint and the sinner, are all parts of One Infinite Whole-Brahman.”¹³ Serving others by looking upon them as God, necessitates an attitude of worship. Swamiji states, “Serve as worship of the Lord Himself in the poor, the miserable, the weak.”¹⁴ Service is a form of worship and worship is a form of service.

Thus, the ethical understanding of the *Upanishads* forms the basis for the great proclamation: 'Work is Worship', as envisaged by Swamiji.

(VII) Evolving well-balanced Indian Society

According to Swamiji, a proper understanding of the *Upanishads* broadens our outlook. It enables us to not only understand ourselves and our glorious tradition, but also the social and political systems of the Western traditions. Swamiji states that this understanding of Western tradition is vital for the evolvment of a well-balanced Indian society. He points out that while the Indian tradition seeks spiritual liberty, the Western tradition seeks political liberty. Swamiji hold that both are one-sided. He proclaims, "To care only for spiritual liberty and not for social liberty is a defect, but the opposite is a still greater defect. Liberty of both Soul and body is to be striven for" ¹⁵

Swamiji visualizes a much-needed union between the East and West to be effected through a synthesis of Indian spirituality with Western materialistic knowledge. He was against the blind rejection of the Western science and technology with a view of ensuring a fair standard of living to the majority of people in India. At the same time, Swamiji sounded an emphatic warning against giving up spiritual pursuits and knowledge under the pressure of modern materialistic affluence.

(VIII) Developing Organizing capacity

Swamiji points out that a dynamic and vibrant society requires the faculty of organization. This can be developed by a proper understanding of our spiritual nature, which is devoid of jealousy, non-obedience and hated-ness.

The importance of organization lies in the fact that it enables the coordination and accumulation of will-power. In Swamiji's own words, 'Being of one mind is the secret of society. For mark you, the future India depends entirely upon that. That is the secret-accumulation of will-power, co-ordination, bringing them all, as it were, into one focus' ¹⁶.

Thus, we are able to observe that Swamiji identifies focus of will power leads to organizational faculty, which in turn, leads to a dynamic and developing society.

CONCLUSION

From the above discussion we are able to understand that in the process of bringing out important characteristics that evolve holistic individuals, we are given to understand Swamiji's perspectives regarding (1) developing faith in oneself (2) understanding the *Upanishads* (3) education (4) women empowerment (5) upliftment of the masses (6) service (7) evolvment of a well-balanced society, and (8) developing organizational capacity. Here, we perceive Swamiji redefining important factors that influence the quality of human life, both at the individual level and at the

societal/national level.

Further, we are able to understand Swamiji's plan for the regeneration of a new India through evolving holistic individuals based on the import of the Upanishads. Here, we perceive Swamiji as a practical Vedantin as well as a visionary-par-excellence.

Let us conclude with Swamiji's vision on the rise of a new India:

".... India, this motherland of ours-a voice is coming unto us, gentle, firm, and yet unmistakable in its utterances, and is gaining volume as days pass by, and behold, the sleeper is awakening! Like a breeze from the Himalayas, it is bringing life into the almost dead bones and muscles, the lethargy is passing away, and only the blind cannot see, or the perverted will not see, that she is awakening, this motherland of ours, from her deep long sleep. None can resist her anymore; never is she going to sleep any more; no outward powers can hold her back any more; for the infinite giant is rising to her feet"¹⁷.

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