HUMANISM IN THE SPEECHES OF SWAMI VIVEKANANDA

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Swami Vivekananda is a man of compassion and affection. He is a rare personality and boon to the world. He is a visionary of the world. His contribution to the people of India in particular and the world in general is immeasurable. Swami Vivekananda is an extraordinary genius with both a spiritual vision and a spiritual mission. In his vision, man is none other than the supreme divinity under a tiny material cover, and human life is nothing but a continuous struggle to express that divinity within. According to him, that society is the highest which affords maximum opportunities to its members to manifest their potential divinity. His mission, then, is to rouse men and women all over the world to an awareness of their divine nature and to show them the ways and means to express that divinity into their thought and actions—in their art, education, literature, culture, social customs and institutions, and, in fact, in all areas of life.

As Swami Vivekananda is a world teacher, his vision has encompassed the spiritual uplift of humanity as a whole, yet he is also one of the greatest leaders of modern India. He has tirelessly worked for India’s regeneration, not only because he was born in India, but also because he has seen that her rich spiritual culture would be the greatest gift to world culture and civilization. He has visualized that a spiritually awakened India would once again bring out a spiritualization of human life and culture in the world. His ideas and ideals have great relevance to the current problems challenging India and the world today. He is a rare and multi-faceted-nonpareil personality without any comparison. He is a prophet who has propagated the India’s culture, Hindu Dharma, the secret of world peace, friendliness and equality.

This study aims at an analysis of the speeches of Swami Vivekananda so as to bring out his humanistic ideals. The Random House Dictionary of the English language: College Edition describes humanism as follows:
(1) Any system or mode of thought or action in which human interests, values and dignity are taken to be of primary importance, as in moral judgments.

(2) Devotion to or study of the humanities.

(3) The studies, principles or culture of the Humanists.

Swami Vivekananda’s speeches, lectures, poems and letters embody the emotional, intellectual and spiritual concerns of mankind. His condemnation of the exploiting tendency of the rich Indians and pity for the miserable condition of the poor brethren in his speeches and lectures, testify to his emotional concern. Hence in his speech: “To my brave boys” he makes an appeal: “Feel, my children, feel; feel for the poor, the ignorant, and the down-trodden; feel till the heart stops and the brain reels and you think you will go mad” (367). Swami Vivekananda says that education is very much essential for the uplift of poor. Lack of education has made the poor to fall a prey to dogmatic ideas. He hits the nail on the head when he publicly diagnoses:

The root of all evils in India is the condition of the poor. The poor in the West are devils; compared to them ours are angels, and it is therefore so much the easier to raise our poor. The only service to be done for our lower classes is to give them education, to develop their lost individuality. That is the great task between our people and the princes. Up to now nothing has been done in that direction. Priest-power and foreign conquest have trodden them down for centuries, and at last the poor of India have forgotten that they are human beings. (362)

It is true that the poor people are not all respected and given importance. They are treated like senseless creatures. After the demise of his spiritual Guru Ramakrishna, Swami Vivekananda was entrusted with the duty of guiding his other disciples whose sole desire was to spend their time in prayer and meditation within the four walls of the Mutt. But it was Swami Vivekananda who imbied in them the idea of social service in addition to their spiritual training for this world and the other world. When Swami Vivekananda wandered as a monk from the Himalayas to Cape Comerin, he witnessed the miserable and terrible poverty of the down-trodden masses all over India and resolved to dedicate himself to the worship of God through the service of his fellow-beings in India. He understood the need for spiritualisation of all Indians to rise from their fallen state by calling them “the children of Brahma” and to make them one with Him.

Swami Vivekananda discloses his religious temperament in his attitude to human body, heart, head and soul. He expresses his religious faith in human body which is higher than all other animals and even all the angels. He explains his conviction in the superiority of human body on account of its power to attain perfection. He presents it in “The First Steps”:

This human body is the greatest body in the universe, and a human being the greatest being. Man is higher than all animals, than all angels; none is greater than man. Even the Devas (Gods) will have to come down again and again to perfection through a human body. Man alone attains to perfection, not even the Devas. (142)
He stresses the importance of human body as a means to reach the ultimate goal, salvation. He remarks in “Practical Vedanta”: “You may build a temple in which to worship God and that may be good, a better one, a much higher one, already exists, the human body” (313).

He also insists that everyone should develop faith in himself first and then in God in order to surmount all obstacles and difficulties in life. Indeed, faith is also another divine feeling that human beings have to cultivate in order to become divine. The cultivation of courage is the backbone of all human achievements. Pity is related to the quality of divine mercy. Swami Vivekananda dilates on the interrelation of divine feelings in such a way that human beings learn to pity the poor and the unfortunate brethren in society. He says in his “The Future of India”: “Love between man and man, man and God will expand the heart and develop love into devotion and sacrifice” (300).

The intensity of Swami Vivekananda’s humanistic impulse is particularly revealed in the course of the following letter written to Miss. Mary Hale of Chicago on 9th July 1897 as appeared in The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda Vol. V:

I have lost all wish for my salvation. I never wanted earthly enjoyments. I must see my machine in strong working order, and then knowing sure that I have put in a lever for the good of humanity, in India at least, which no power can drive back, I will sleep, without caring what will be next; and may I be born again and again, and suffer thousands of miseries so that I may worship the only God that exists, the only God I believe in, the sum total of all souls—and, above all, my God the wicked, my God the miserable, my God the poor of all races, of all species, is the special object of my worship. (136)

The humanism expounds by Swami Vivekananda is intensely human and universal. But it is also something more than human; for it derives its strength and sanction from the ever-present and inalienable divine spark in all men and women. And that constitutes its uniqueness. Man’s strength and knowledge can be either destructive or constructive; they can give him and his fellow human beings life and love, and joy and peace, or death and hatred, sorrow and unfulfilment. Which of these two a man will choose will primarily depend on the spiritual development, the consciousness level, that he has attained, and only secondarily on his economic and social environment. It is obvious to say that economically highly developed societies can foster, cannot escape from, alienation, loneliness, and crime; but the other truth is not so obvious, yet India’s experience demonstrates it, that poverty and crime need not go together, that poverty of the pocket need not always mean poverty of heart. If the human consciousness functions at the sensate level, and at the level of the ego presiding over man’s organic system, man can scatter only tension and peacelessness around him. But if it functions from the deeper level of his divine dimension he will become naturally and spontaneously, a focus of love and peace and fearlessness around him.

In the book ‘Swami Vivekananda: HIS HUMANISM’ Swami Ranganathananda says that Swami Vivekananda is over confident with his own people that they will surely develop their spirit of humanism with the divine power already embedded in their minds. Swami Vivekananda insists that the people should develop the spirit of humanism gradually until it unfurls and blossoms into a divine power. Swami Vivekananda says that fear which is the first enemy of man should get away so that it paves the way for the divinity which is very essential. He also says that foreigners are devoid of divine power which results into their uncivilized bestiality and immoral life. Swami Ranganathananda says:
A humanism that is strengthened and sustained by the ignition of the divine spark in man is far different from the current humanism of the West, including its scientific humanism. There is a universality and dynamism in the former, and its energies are entirely positive and never negative. That is the strength and range and relevance of Swami Vivekananda’s Vedantic humanism. He accepts the human situation, man as the readers find him in society. He also accepts the need for the manipulation of his socio-political conditions, upto a point, to ensure his growth and development. But he will insist that man must develop and grow further, that he must evolve and steadily unfold also the higher divine possibilities hidden within him. This is echoed in modern biology in the concept of psycho-social evolution, of evolution rising from the organic level to the ethical and moral levels. Swami Vivekananda would appreciate the remark of the Western thinker, it may be Victor Hugo, that we are not men yet, but only candidates to humanity! If man’s inside is tense and tumultuous, it means that he has not overcome fear; it means further that he cannot be a guarantee for the peace and fearlessness of the rest of the world. (47)

Swami Ranganathananda’s view reveals that the Humanism is the basic and innate fundamental trait of every human being which is the opener of divine power already existed in the body of every human being.

The Treaty of Versailles says: “More wars are caused by bad-tempered people seeking to discuss peace measures than by good tempered people seeking to discuss war measures!” (48) The UNESCO Preamble embodies this very sentiment: “Since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defenses of peace must be constructed” (48). Swami Vivekananda’s humanism fully endorses this sentiment. The world knows that the Treaty of Versailles was drawn up by people who were full of tempers compounded of nationalistic violence and colonialist exploitation. Certainly such minds could not bring peace. On the contrary as later events proved, they were sowing seeds of a more devastating war in the name of peace, along with the seeds of much tension and fear in the inter-war years. It is evident that Swami Vivekananda is in favor of war-free world and humanism. He says that humanism should take part in all the dealings which happen between the countries in connection with the wars. All the countries mainly concerned with the capturing of the boundaries of neighboring countries, and it is against the spirit of Versailles Treaty which says to abhor violence and exploitation while doing peace talks with the other countries.

The Atman, the divine one and immortal Self in all, is the only rational sanction, says Swami Vivekananda, for all ethical and moral life and action, for all humanistic impulses and behavior. When man manifests, the Atman in his life and behavior even a little, he becomes fearless and at peace with himself and at peace with the world, for he then realizes his spiritual oneness with all.

The ancient scripture, The Upanishads offer the brilliant way of life but people are self-centered and power hungry and they are willing to destroy all the principles for the sake of survival. In the book Swami Vivekananda: HIS HUMANISM Swami Ranganathananda clearly reveals that Upanishads are the source of Hinduism, which deals with the way of life. It explains the soul which is otherwise called as Atman. If the heart is free from all unnecessary tensions it will pave the way for accepting good ideals. If good ideals occupied the soul, the human will be soft and gentle in his attempts to follow the good ideals and preach the same to others. Swami Ranganathanantha says about Atman, which is vividly described in The Upanishads. Swami Ranganathanantha says:
All the tensions of man’s physical life, all the complexes of his mental dimensions, become gently resolved in this higher dimension of the human personality. This is humanism with the deepest spiritual import and therefore, with the widest social relevance, most stable and steady and, therefore, beyond the reach of the pressures, narrow and violent, of all political, racial, and religious prejudices, frenzies, and passions. (49)

It is clearly seen that The Upanishads, the religious book of Hindus which deal the way of life a man to be followed, but contrary to this expectations man has become self-centered and he is very much eager to trespass the rules and regulations.

This is the uniqueness of the Indian outlook, and of the Indian approach to inter-human and international relations as interpreted by Swami Vivekananda. India’s history can be considered from two points of view: Firstly, its successes; secondly, its failures. It has failed in certain fields, but it has registered success in certain other fields. It has so far failed to evolve a truly egalitarian social order. But it has succeeded in developing and maintaining a uniformly peaceful attitude and policy in its international and inter-religious relations. It is impressive that, during her long history of five thousand years, India has never gone outside her boundaries to conquer and enslave and exploit other nations, even when she had the political and military power to do so. This is the sweet fruit of her philosophy of man in depth, of her vision of the One Self in all, which made her evaluate man as man, and not as conditioned by his external variable factors such as race, creed, or political nationality. Universal peace and toleration derives only from a universal vision.

Swami Ranganathanantha says that the humanist record is internationally impressive in the Indian history. He says:

Vivekananda’s humanism is based on this universal Vedantic vision of man as the Atman. This vision of India’s sages and philosophers did not remain as a vision, but was given unique political expressions by several Indian political states at the all-India as well as provincial levels, among whom the most outstanding example was the policy and programme of the Mauryan Emperor Ashoka of the third century before Christ. Experiencing remorse after his successful but bloody war with his neighbouring Kalinga state, Ashoka renounced all wars as the instrument of state policy and, as proclaimed through his numerous rock and pillar edicts, many of which still exist, he silenced all war drums, yuddha-bheri, and struck the kettle-drums of truth and justice, dharma-bheri; and this not only in the political and international fields, but also in the fields of inter-religious relations. This wise policy of non-violence, active toleration, and international understanding was taken up by his successors also at the all-India and provincial levels, who extended welcome and hospitality to successive foreign racial and religious groups and refugees fleeing from persecution from their own countries, like the Jews and the early Christians from West Asia and the Zoroastrians from Iran. (51)

It is crystal clear to say that India never indulges in wanton-war with other countries and respects the mutual boundaries of other countries. India only wants to have a society where all people live with health and prosperity. It never takes the path of violence and it always teaches tolerance and endurance and peaceful living with each other.
In several of his speeches, Swami Vivekananda has referred to this peaceful character of India’s international relations. It is evident from his speeches that other nations are power hungry and never bothers about the destruction of mankind for the sake of occupying the territories of other countries. He is mainly concerned with the propagation of good concepts of Hindu religion. In his, “First Public Lecture in the East,” delivered in Colombo, Sri Lanka in January 1897 as appeared in The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda Vol. III. Swami Vivekananda says about the uniqueness of Hindu religion:

The debt which the world owes to our motherland is immense. Taking country with country, there is not one race on this earth to which the world owes so much as to the patient Hindu, the mild Hindu. “The mild Hindu” sometimes is used as an expression of reproach; but if ever a reproach concealed a wonderful truth, it is in the term, “the mild Hindu”, who has always been the blessed child of God. Civilizations have arisen in other parts of the world. In ancient times and in modern times, great ideas have emanated from strong and great races. In ancient and in modern times, wonderful ideas have been carried forward from one race to another. In ancient and in modern times, seeds of great truth and power have been cast abroad by the advancing tides of national life; but mark you, my friends, it has been always with the blast of war trumpets and with the march of embattled cohorts. Each idea had to be soaked in a deluge of blood. Each idea had to wade through the blood of millions of our fellow-beings. Each word of power had to be followed by the groans of millions, by the wails of orphans, by the tears of widows. This, in the main, other nations have taught; but India has for thousands of years peacefully existed. Here activity prevailed when even Greece did not exist, when Rome was not thought of, when the very fathers of the modern Europeans lived in the forest and painted themselves blue. Even earlier, when history has no record, and tradition dares not peer into the gloom of that intense past, even from then until now, ideas after ideas have marched out from her, but every word has been spoken with a blessing behind it, and peace before it. We, of all nations of the world, have never been a conquering race, and that blessing is on our head, and therefore we live. (105)

It exposes that India is a peace loving country and it never thinks of conquering other countries. This is the unique human traits embedded in the minds of Indian, which is the God given gift.

Swami Vivekananda says about the spiritual knowledge which is given by the Indians to the world. He says:

Gifts of political knowledge can be made with the blast of trumpets and the march of cohorts. Gifts of secular knowledge and social knowledge can be made with fire and sword. But spiritual knowledge can be given only in silence like the dew that falls unseen and unheard, yet bringing into bloom masses of roses. This has been the gift of India to the world again and again. (222)

It clearly reveals that the spiritual knowledge can be attained by the person when they are in complete silence internally. The spiritual knowledge is invincible and it can only be realized by the individuals. The spiritualism can be infused to the people very slowly and it is the gift of India and it is a remedy for the social evils of India. He also supports Buddhism as it is doing the same way as that of Hinduism. His view that spirituality is the fruit of India’s humanism is to be worth mentioned here.
Humanism in short does not prevail in a place where perseverance and endurance are not practiced. It is only a civilized attitude of people. Even though the spirit of humanism is not prevalent among the people in India he insists that it should be practiced at all costs for the betterment of the society. He advised his own people to follow the footsteps of foreigners.

Bibliography


