

Asian Resonance

Mysticism in the Works of Swami Vivekananda



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Abstract

Swami Vivekananda created a lot much difference in a short span of his thirty-nine years of life (1863-1902). In 1893, Swami Vivekananda came into lime light at the Parliament of religions held in Chicago. It was his deep spiritual insight and excellent conversation skills supplemented by his in-depth knowledge of his Eastern and Western cultures that people respected him. He possessed a great clarity of thought and power of expression.

Swami Vivekananda had a great poetic temperament. Out of all his writings the most effective form are the verses which count a lot to his most personal accounts. He is enough honest into his renditions about the trials of a yogi. They are perfect in revealing the attainment of spiritualism and such trepidations and profundity are enchanted themes for most poets and writers. His poetic quality of weaving the words with an ethereal brilliance renders the verses sublime. These poems are a secret window to the passions of a man who had essentially lived a life of renunciation and public service.

A mystic, a philosopher and a poet, his ideas are soul stirring and an inspiration in today's age when man is continuously searching for answers. This paper will focus upon how Swami Vivekananda brings the understanding of mystic ideas beautifully through his compositions for the readers.

Keywords: Mystic, Divine, Soul, Philosopher, Inspiration, Spirituality and Knowledge.

Introduction

Swami Vivekananda acquired an acquaintance as a great mystic, yogi and a saint. He was the one who ignited and heralded the birth of national renaissance in India. His creative impulses were very much imbibed in his poetic expressions. The verses were the most personal accounts of his creativity. As per his friends and peers, his poetic expressions concurred with Mathew Arnold's idea of true poetry. Mostly, being conceived and composed in his soul. He was the one who took us back to the fundamental values of our culture and appealed to find the truth in Upanishads and the Bhagawad Gita. In the words of Sri Aurobindo:

"The movement associated with the great names of Ramakrishna and Vivekananda has been a very wide synthesis of past religious motives and spiritual experience topped by a reaffirmation of the old asceticism and monasticism, but with new living strands in it arid combined with a strong humanitarianism and zeal of missionary expansion."¹

Objective of the Study

It is really difficult to come across divine enlightenment and be a blessed one who can perceive and present a prophetic picture of the future. Such individuals can envision the past, present and future in continuity. They are the ones whose ideas survive the boundaries of time and space. Swami Vivekananda proved to be one such gift of God to humanity. This study is done to comprehend how he dedicated himself to the welfare of the entire humanity along with spreading the message of the essential unity of all faiths and religions. How his verses contributed to realize the need for spiritual pursuits for achieving higher goals of human life.²

Review of the Literature

Puthiyath, J.D. conducted a study upon the works of Swami Vivekananda and the findings of his study were (i) education was defined as physical health, the training of the intellect, and spiritual training for the youth, and religion was established as related to other interests, science and morality (ii) Swami Vivekananda believed that the child learned through self education and things were made clear by his own power of

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perception and thought; the teacher should be helper and a guide; teaching should be adjusted to the needs of the children wherein the teacher had sympathy for the child. (iii) He defined religion as realization and stressed the need for religious education without dogmas (iv) He felt that women education should be developed with religion as the core and all other training secondary to it. (v) The answer to progress, he claimed, was through mass education which was not likely to be effective in poverty (vi) He believed in the universal brotherhood of man, in the upliftment of mankind.

In a nut shell, it can be said that not only Puthiyath and many other researchers found Swami Vivekananda was more inclined towards naturalism. He expresses his faith in God and instead of regarding nature as final truth, he sees the supreme truth in the form of sat, chit and anand. He laid emphasis on self-realization, regarding salvation as the supreme aim of life. He emphasizes the inclusion of social, cultural and humanistic subjects in the curriculum. Moral and spiritual development has been the purpose of him.³

Swami Vivekananda could recognize the divinity all around him in the materialistic world. The poetic works of him possessed an interjection of a human soul full of intellectualism, so as not to be led into hedonism rather longs for a spiritual union with the Almighty. He aimed at the betterment of the world and spiritual liberation. He said:

"Each soul is potentially divine. The goal is to manifest this divinity within the controlling nature, external and internal."

He took an initiative to teach the people to be strong, fearless, kind, strictly moral to conquer ego and to understand God. At times he used to feel overwhelmed by seeing the beauty of things created by God. Once, on observing a brilliant full moon of a particular evening he wondered and uttered very naturally: "why recite poetry when there is the very essence of poetry?" (Eastern and Western Disciples. 2002: 481). His conversations, writings and creative abilities are festooned with such poetic surges and imaginative reflections.

In Indian English Poetry, Swami Vivekananda was the very first one to compose poetries with mysticism. He wrote songs, poems, and hymns etc which were full with the artistic expressions comprising unfathomable spiritual urges. He has worked upon poetry with varied subjects like: mystery of creation, peace, meditation, Yoga, Brahman, Goddess Kali, Lord Shiva and his longing for liberation etc. Many of his poems are soaked in spiritualism and mysticism. The sources of Vivekananda's poetic thoughts and themes can be basically brought out from the study of his letters and speeches and the data collected and detailed by his disciples. *Kali The Mother* is one such poem with mystical idea. Sister Nivedita wrote it during their pilgrimage to Kshir Bhavani temple in Kashmir in 1898. Vivekananda got so much inspired that he could not rest till he gave words to his innermost thoughts with the inspiration. He wrote:

"The stars are blotted out,

Asian Resonance

*The clouds are covering clouds.
It is darkness vibrant, sonant.
In the roaring, whirling wind
Are the souls of a million lunatics
Just loosed from the prison-house,
Wrenching trees by the roots,
Sweeping all from the path.
The sea has joined the fray,
And swirled up mountain-waves,
To reach the pitchy sky."*

(Vivekananda, 2007: 25)

Dr. R C Majumdar, in his book *Swami Vivekananda: A historical Review*, has said, "Some of his English poems have reached a sublimity of no mean order. The best and most famous of them is 'Kali The Mother'." (Majumdar. 1999: 85).

The divinely inspired saint realized God within his heart and felt oneness with all animate and inanimate objects. 'In search of God' he says:

*In reapture all my soul was hushed,
Entranced, enthralled in bliss.
A flash illumined all my soul;
The heart of my heart opened wide.
O joy, O bliss, what do I find!
My love, my love you are here
And you are here, my love, my all!
And I was searching thee –
From all eternity you were there
Enthralled in majesty!⁴*

The saintly figure, Swami Vivekananda strongly believed in the oneness and omnipresence of God. His heart and mind had a conviction that the entire creation is extended throughout by the same divine power. 'To a friend', he reveals his divine experience:

*"From highest Brahman to the
yonder worn,
And all the very minutest atom,
Everywhere is the same God, the
All-Love,
Friend, offer mind, soul, body, at
their feet."*

He had his opinion regarding humanity and its welfare that it should be put on the top priority of a devotee. The best, fair and only way to worship the Almighty is to serve its creations without any ifs and buts. No divisions, categories and discriminations shall be made while serving humanity. According to Swami Vivekananda, God exists in all the human souls. He is the soul of man; what privilege can men ask? It is a privilege to serve mankind; for this is the worship of God. God keeps no special messengers, never ever, and never will. All beings, great or small, are equal manifestations of God; the difference is only in the degree of manifestation. The same eternal message, which has been eternally given, comes to each and every human. The eternal message has been written in the heart of every being; it is there already, and all are struggling to express it. As bearers of the message, are all one. What claim to superiority is there? The most ignorant man, the most ignorant child, is as great a messenger of God as any that ever existed and as great as any that is yet to come.

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"Ye fools! Who neglect the living God And
His infinite reflections
with which the world is full, While ye run with
the imaginary
shadows, Him worship, the only visible!
Break all other idols!"

The poet is willing to get away from the
delusions so as to feel and embrace the supreme. He
targets to acquire the purity, leaving behind the
passionless, detaching and desireless existence of
materialisms. He said to sister Nivedita,

"The Mother herself is Brahman. Her
curse is blessing.

The Heart must become a cremation
ground – pride,
selfishness, desire all burnt to ashes.
Then and then alone, with the
Mother come."⁵

When we get over-powered with the illusions
of Maya, it leads to the biggest obstacle on the way
towards self-realization. The only thing a human is
supposed to do is to remove the covering of the Maya
from our minds and hearts. Then we will certainly
realize that the Man and God are one. The
materialistic world drags us towards the diversions
such as shape of the body, sex, caste and creed etc.
The most vital thing which is to be realized is to know
the Brahma, the Bliss absolute. Swami Vivekananda
could realize his true self and became freed himself
from the bondages of Maya, that means he could free
himself from the materialistic world. He believed in the
formless, faceless Param Brahma. As a student, he
had confirmed to the Brahma Samaj Movement. Sri
Ramakrishna taught him that there was one supreme
who created this entire universe, which Vivekananda
reiterated in his poem 'The Song Of The Free, in the
line – "Nor two nor many, 'tis but one" (Vivekananda.
2007: 7) He also learned from that the gods and
goddesses were manifestations of His power and
were a part of His creation. Hence, while one must
know and believe in the Absolute *Brahma*, one must
not deject the Gods and Goddesses. The
transcendental *Brahma* has been described in several
verses through the mystic eye of Vivekananda. In a
song Of Creation he writes:

"One Mass, devoid of form, name and
colour,
Timeless, devoid of time past and
future,
Spaceless, voiceless, boundless,
devoid of all -
Where rests hushed and even speech
of negation."

(Vivekananda. 2007: 38).

His songs are replete with joy, bliss and
spirituality. In 'A Song I Sing To Thee', he expresses:

"Calmed are the clamours of the
urgent flesh. The tumult of the
Boastful mind is hushed, chords of the
heart are loosened and
set free, unfastened are the bondages
that bind."⁶

Asian Resonance

Self-realization is God-realization. The mist of Maya
dissolves through concentration and meditation. God
is truth, he is eternal, and is behind the ever changing
phenomenon of the world. He is the immutable centre
of endless mobility. Swami Vivekananda realized this
ultimate truth in the poem 'Misunderstood':

"This world's a dream
Though true it seem
And only truth is he the living!
The real me is none but He
And never never mother changing!"

He was a transcendentalist. He saw Himself
in all things and all things in Himself. Love for God
can be achieved through renunciation. Repeated
practice of meditation awakens our coiled up power or
kundalini. It is the state of ecstasy and divine wisdom
may be attained through it. In the context of mysticism
and poetry it must be noted that poetry concerned
with mysticism does not present a mystical
experience as it is, instead a mystic poet rebuilds the
experience with the help of linguistic tools and from
the transcendental, brings it into the realm of nature.
The transcendental or the metaphysical is often
perceived in forms of symbols and images founded on
the analogies grounded on the Divine truth. In 'In
search of God' Swamiji says:

"A gentle soft and soothing voice
That said 'my son', 'my son'
That seemed to thrill in unison
With all the chords of my soul."⁷

Swami Vivekananda being a great mystic
poet possessed an ardent optimistic approach within
himself. It was his firm belief that is a person is true,
pure, pious, compassionate and virtuous; he will be
victorious in every walk of life. The life consists of two
sides: one is pleasure and the other is pain. Both
these attributes are never permanent; they keep
moving and the wheel of life changes. We shouldn't
get affected by the longer or shorter stay of any of
these. In his poem, 'Thou Blessed Dream', he
expresses:

If things go ill or well-
If joy rebounding spreads the face,
Or sea of sorrow swells-
It is a dream, a play."

Swami Vivekananda being a great optimistic
person never considered death to be some kind of
horrible thing. According to him it is also the
incarnation of the Eternal. It is God who is responsible
for creation as well as destruction. He had mystic
vision of the pervasiveness of God in nature.
Mysticism is, in truth, a temper rather than a doctrine.
It is an attitude of mind founded upon an intuitive or
experienced conviction of a Divine Truth that governs
this universe. Each mystic poet has treated the
medium of poetry in his own accord to document his
experiences and mystical intuitions. Yet they all are
similar in their emphasis of the imageless character of
the reality. No matter the country or age, the works of
all mystics have resonated with the words of Krishna:

"There is true knowledge. Learn thou it
is this:
To see one changeless Life in all the
Lives,

E: ISSN No. 2349-9443

And in the Separate, One Inseparable.”

(The Bhagwat Gita, Book 18.)

Vivekananda concedes that sometimes a sage in *Samadhi* is able to see something so divine that he falls short of words to express it. In *Who Knows How Mother Plays* Vivekananda says,

“Perchance the shining sage
Saw more than he could tell”

(Vivekananda. 2007: 31).

Swamiji fills the divine presence in the moonlight, sunlight, stars, morning, evening, night, in sea, rivers, in melodious songs of birds in the innocent faces of children and in mother's affection. The immanence of God in nature has been beautifully expressed in :

“The moon's soft light, the stars so
bright
The glorious orb of day,
He shines in them,.....
In nature's beauty, songs of birds,
I see through them – it is he.”

Conclusion

Swami Vivekananda's poems are remarkable for their lyrical qualities, intensity of feeling and spontaneity. A powerful undercurrent of mysticism and spiritualism flows through them. The lyrics like 'The Dance of Shiva' and 'Shiva in Ecstasy' exhibit wonderful lyricism. Swami Vivekananda's poems are also remarkable for the use of rich and beautiful imagery. The use of metaphor, simile, personification and mythological images enhance poetic beauty of his mystical poems. Nature's imagery is in abundance in his poetry. He has worked upon light and water both using them as imagery in his poetic creations. In the poem, 'Kali The Mother', the extinguishing light symbolizes destruction of the world. Water symbolizes streams, oceans, waves, rain, rivers and floods etc that shows the changes in the materialistic lives.

Asian Resonance

Swami Vivekananda had a good command over English language. His poetic style is characterized by simplicity, spontaneity, sublimity, harmony, grace, melody, music and in-depth knowledge of materialistic and divine existence.

He was one of the greatest mystic poets in Indian English Literature. He was an illuminated, inspired and divine soul. Sir Aurobindo said:

“Swami Vivekananda was a soul of
puissance, if ever there was

One, a very lion among men. We
perceive his influence still working
gigantically.....

something leonine, grand, intuitive,
upheaving, has entered the soul of
India, and we say, Behold! He still live in
the soul of His Mother
and in the soul of his children.”⁸

Endnotes

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8. *Quoted from Ramakrishnan, S. (Editor) : Bhawan's Journal (Bombay, Bhartiya Vidya Bhawan: Vol. 39, Jan 15, 1993, P. 20)*