



Relevance of Swami Vivekananda's Message

for today's youth

I

India is undergoing a period of great transition. A centuries old giant – asleep for many centuries – is waking up to its role in the world stage.

This phase in our country's 5000 year history is generating hope and vigor in millions of our fellow countrymen. New economic opportunities. New modes of communication like internet and telecommunications. New importance from the world community. And a new social freedom.

But during this phase, we are also experiencing the weakness and challenges that have developed in our national fabric. Endemic corruption. Excessive commercialization of fields like education and health. A desire to 'get rich quick' without putting in the necessary hard-work. And an increasing cynicism regarding national institutions like parliament, police, judiciary, government machinery, etc.

To engage effectively with the new opportunities the youth of today must become effective, result oriented, and aggressive. At the same time, to deal with the moral and social challenges that face us, the youth must develop a sense of responsibility for the nation, strong character, and a willingness to stand up for the national good.

This dual-development – of effectiveness and values, of outward expansion of activities combined with an inner strengthening of character – this combination of seeking both – *abhyudaya* and *nihshreyaya* – is the need of the hour for today's youth.



III

Swami Vivekananda also clarifies to the youth, the ideas or ‘modes of thinking’ that enables them to develop the heroic attitude, the first building block idea being “*I am the creator of my own destiny*”.

A person holding this idea will first and foremost take responsibility for himself or herself. Such a person will not blame others – parents, society, institutions, government for the difficulties and challenges faced in life.

In the words of Swami Vivekananda:

Those that blame others — and, alas! the number of them is increasing every day — are generally miserable with helpless brains; they have brought themselves to that pass through their own mistakes and blame others, but this does not alter their position. It does not serve them in any way. This attempt to throw the blame upon others only weakens them the more. Therefore, blame none for your own faults, stand upon your own feet, and take the whole responsibility upon yourselves. Say, "This misery that I am suffering is of my own doing, and that very thing proves that it will have to be undone by me alone." That which I created, I can demolish; that which is created by some one else I shall never be able to destroy. Therefore, stand up, be bold, be strong. Take the whole responsibility on your own shoulders, and know that you are the creator of your own destiny. All the strength and succour you want is within yourselves. Therefore, make your own future.ⁱⁱⁱ

Thus, the heroic person is, first and foremost, awakened to *atma-shraddha* or belief in himself or herself.

In the words of Swami Vivekananda:

What we want, is this Shraddha. Unfortunately, it has nearly vanished from India, and this is why we are in our present state. What makes the difference between man and man is the difference in this Shraddha and nothing else. What makes one man great and another weak and low is this Shraddha. My Master used to say, he who thinks himself weak will become weak, and that is true. This Shraddha must enter into you.^{iv}



IV

Secondly, Swami Vivekananda believed that the person with a heroic attitude will step out of the narrow cage of pay, prospects, and promotions. Such a person will enter the journey of ever-widening circle of personal growth, increasing self-esteem, enhancing one's inner and outer capacities, and making increasing contributions to society at large.

Youth with a heroic attitude are not interested in being “*static individuals*” satisfied with living in a comfort zone – either physically or psychologically. Instead such youth become “*dynamic individuals*” who embrace great challenges, and in the process, awaken the infinite power lying dormant within themselves.

In the words of Swami Vivekananda:

What our country now wants are muscles of iron and nerves of steel, gigantic wills which nothing can resist, which can penetrate into the mysteries and the secrets of the universe, and will accomplish their purpose in any fashion even if it meant going down to the bottom of the ocean and meeting death face to face.^v

Thus, the heroic person is awakened to the glorious journey of ‘being and becoming’.

In the words of Swami Vivekananda:

Young men ..., my hope is in you. Will you respond to the call of your nation? Each one of you has a glorious future if you dare believe me. Have a tremendous faith in yourselves, like the faith I had when I was a child, and which I am working out now. Have that faith, each one of you, in yourself — that eternal power is lodged in every soul — and you will revive the whole of India. Ay, we will then go to every country under the sun, and our ideas will before long be a component of the many forces that are working to make up every nation in the world.^{vi}



V

The third building block idea held by a heroic person is the idea of *responsibility for the collective*.

In the words of Swami Vivekananda:

Feel, therefore, my would-be reformers, my would-be patriots! Do you feel? Do you feel that millions and millions of the descendants of gods and of sages have become next-door neighbours to brutes? Do you feel that millions are starving today, and millions have been starving for ages? Do you feel that ignorance has come over the land as a dark cloud? Does it make you restless? Does it make you sleepless? Has it gone into your blood, coursing through your veins, becoming consonant with your heartbeats? Has it made you almost mad? Are you seized with that one idea of the misery of ruin, and have you forgotten all about your name, your fame, your wives, your children, your property, even your own bodies? Have you done that?^{vii}

A heroic person believes that he/ she is responsible for the welfare of his fellowmen. Great heroes, through the ages, from Arjuna to Ashoka to Shivaji and Rani of Jhansi have fought great challenges not for the sake of their own personal welfare but for the sake of their fellowmen, their countrymen.

The heroic soul is thus awakened to the power of unselfish action.

In the words of Swami Vivekananda:

Power and things like that will come by themselves. Put yourself to work, and you will find such tremendous power coming to you that you will feel it hard to bear. Even the least work done for others awakens the power within; even thinking the least good of others gradually instils into the heart the strength of a lion. I love you all ever so much, but I wish you all to die working for others — I should rather be glad to see you do that!^{viii}



VI

It is these dimensions of heroism that Swami Vivekananda wanted to awaken in the youth of today

- (i) The strength of *atma-shraddha*
- (ii) The journey of “being and becoming”
- (iii) The power of “unselfish action”

When these dimensions of heroism are awakened in our youth, they will become fearless “*abhih*”, they will become strong, and they will become large hearted and capable of great deeds for the nation.

In the words of Swami Vivekananda:

We have to become *Abhih*, fearless, and our task will be done. Arise, awake, for your country needs this tremendous sacrifice. It is the young men that will do it. "The young, the energetic, the strong, the well-built, the intellectual" — for them is the task.^{ix}

With such a youth, India will not only take its place on the world stage, but it will also become a role-model to the whole world. The small challenges we face in this period of change will be easily overcome.

ⁱ CW: Vol. 3: Lectures from Colombo to Almora: My Plan Of Campaign; Delivered at the Victoria Hall, Madras (p.222,225)

ⁱⁱ Swami Ranganathananda: Eternal Values for a Changing Society: Vol. IV: The Philosophy of Democratic Administration (p.190)

ⁱⁱⁱ CW: Vol. 2: Jnana-Yoga: The Cosmos, The Microcosm; Delivered in New York, 26th January 1896: (p.225)

^{iv} CW: Vol. 3: Lectures from Colombo to Almora: Address of welcome presented at Calcutta and reply (p.320)

^v CW: Vol. 3: Lectures from Colombo to Almora: The mission of the Vedanta (p.190)

^{vi} CW: Vol. 3: Lectures from Colombo to Almora: The future of India (p.303,304)

^{vii} CW: Vol. 3: Lectures from Colombo to Almora: My plan of campaign; Delivered at the Victoria Hall, Madras (p.225,226)

^{viii} CW: Vol. 5: Conversations and Dialogues: From the diary of a disciple: (p.382)

^{ix} CW: Vol. 3: Lectures from Colombo to Almora: Address of welcome presented at Calcutta and reply (p.318)