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# Swami Vivekananda

*The worship and service of humanity are the only prayers in which the worshiper, the worship, and the worshiped are One.* - Swami Vivekananda.

Swami Vivekananda, one of Bharat's most revered monks and spiritual leaders, was born as Narendranath Datta on 12th January 1863 into a Bengali Kayastha family in Calcutta. His father, Vishwanath Datta, was a prominent legal practitioner at the Calcutta High Court, while his mother, Bhubaneswari Devi, was a devout and spiritual housewife who played a key role in nurturing his spiritual inclinations. From a very young age, Vivekananda displayed a profound interest in spirituality, often meditating before idols of Lord Shiva, Lord Ram, and other deities. His life changed significantly when he became an ardent disciple of the great spiritual leader Sri Ramakrishna, whose teachings shaped his mission to revive Indian culture and inspire humanity.



Swami Vivekananda remains one of the most revered spiritual leaders and social reformers in Indian history. He not only introduced the profound philosophy of Vedanta to the Western world but also inspired Indians to see God in humanity and serve the downtrodden. As the saying goes, *“Service to mankind is service to God,”* a belief that Swami Vivekananda embodied throughout his life. Unlike spiritual figures detached from worldly concerns, he

combined his deep spirituality with an unwavering commitment to social upliftment and national revival.

A true patriot-saint, Swamiji believed, "A nation's greatness is measured by how it treats its weakest members." Swami Vivekananda tirelessly inspired Indians to uplift the poor and downtrodden, reminding them that true success lies in empowering the vulnerable. His message of ***"Arise, awake, and stop not till the goal is reached"*** became a call for national awakening and selfless service.

Swami Vivekananda fiercely condemned the practice of "Don't-touchism" (i.e. untouchability)—the most regressive and exclusionary of caste-based custom which is derivative of religion. He derided it as "kitchen religion", a hollow practice obsessed with superficial rules regarding dining and physical contact among members of different castes. In his piercing critique, he declared:

***"The present religion of the Hindus is neither the path of Knowledge nor of Reason—it is 'Don't-touchism.' 'Don't touch me! Don't touch me!'—that exhausts its description. 'Don't-touchism' is a form of mental disease. Beware!"***

For Vivekananda, these restrictive mind-sets represented the antithesis of true spirituality. He believed that expansion is the essence of life and warned against any practice that shrinks or divides humanity. In his words: ***"All expansion is life; all contraction is death. All love is expansion; all selfishness is contraction. Love is, therefore, the only law of life."***

Swami Vivekananda urged society to rise above such divisive practices and embrace the core teaching of the Upanishads: "Atma-vaṭ sarvabhūteṣu" (आत्मवत् सर्वभूतेषु)— ***"Look upon all beings as your own self."*** He questioned the hypocrisy of those who professed to purify others but became "impure" at the mere touch or breath of another human being. His voice thundered with reason and compassion as he asked: ***"How will they grant salvation who cannot feed a hungry mouth with a crumb of bread? How will those, who become impure at the mere breath of others, purify others?"***

For Vivekananda, true religion was not confined to rituals or scripture but lay in service to humanity and the recognition of the divine in every being. He reminded us that religion devoid of love, compassion, and inclusivity becomes a dire irreligion. In his vision, "Service to man is service to God," and the true test of spirituality is in uplifting others, feeding the hungry, and embracing all with love and equality.

His words are as relevant today as they were then, serving as a clarion call to eliminate prejudice and divisiveness. Swami Vivekananda's teachings urge us to break free from the chains of caste and embrace the spirit of oneness, for only through love, expansion, and selflessness can humanity truly thrive.

Swami Vivekananda envisioned true Hinduism as a pure, unifying force—one that liberates, not the manipulated version that imposes chains and predetermines destiny of individual's mere by their birth. For him, religion should never restrict one's potential; it should empower individuals to realize their full abilities. In his iconic address at the 1893 World's Parliament of Religions in Chicago, he boldly declared:

***“I am proud to belong to a religion that has taught the world both tolerance and universal acceptance. We believe not only in universal toleration but accept all religions as true. I am proud to belong to a nation that has sheltered the persecuted and refugees of all faiths and nations.”***

With these words, Vivekananda not only captured the essence of India’s spiritual ethos but also called the world to embrace the power of acceptance and unity.

Swami Vivekananda believed that education was the most vital service that could uplift the poor of all communities in India. He declared:

***“The only service to be done for our lower classes is to give them education, to develop their lost individuality.”***

For centuries, priestly dominance and foreign conquest had crushed the spirit of the masses, leaving them to forget their humanity. Vivekananda emphasized that true help lies in giving them ideas and opening their eyes to the world, for “Knowledge is power, and ignorance is death.” He firmly believed that “Every nation, every man, and every woman must work out their own salvation.”

Education, he argued, would empower the poor to lift themselves, for as the Chinese proverb goes: “Provide someone with a fish, and they'll have food for a day; teach them how to fish, and they'll have food for a lifetime.”

Swami Vivekananda also recognized the disregard for the masses as India’s “great national crime.” He said,

***“The poor, the low, the disadvantaged in India have no friends, no help — they sink lower each day, feeling the blows of a cruel society.”***

He highlighted that millions were oppressed in the name of religion, and one of India’s key downfalls was the monopoly of education by the privileged classes, which kept the masses in ignorance. By providing knowledge and inspiration, we enable individuals to shape their destinies—the only lasting solution to poverty and oppression.

Swami Vivekananda’s teachings inspire us to embrace unity, compassion, and selfless service. He believed in the power of education, love, and spirituality to uplift humanity. His vision of equality and social reform reminds us to recognize the divine in everyone and work for the greater good of society.

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