

Awakening through Verse: The Transformative Power of Vivekanand's Poetry

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Abstract

Swami Vivekananda is revered as one of the great modern saints and philosophers who dedicated his ideas in the shape of eternal speeches, letters and poetry. Belief in the dictum Work is Worship and putting it into action is the main concept of all his works. That is, he believes that it is worthless to think without acting in accordance with it. This paper will discuss how the poetry of Swami Vivekananda brings awakening and social transformation to the inner. His poems are not only literary utterances but effective appeals to action combined with spirituality and patriotic zeal. Vivekananda in his poetry inspires the reader to overcome fear, ignorance, and weakness through the themes of strength, self-realization, and unity with God. His lyrics are echoed with Vedantic wisdom and his love for India calling people to realize their full potential and be of service to the people. The paper brings to fore the poetic voice of Vivekananda, which inspires generations by lifting their minds and awakening their souls.

Keywords: Swami Vivekananda, Spiritual awakening, Transformative poetry, Vedanta philosophy, Patriotism and service, Inner strength, Self-realization, Divine unity, National consciousness, Inspirational verse.

Swami Vivekananda, born Narendra Nath Datta, was an Indian Hindu monk and the principal follower of the 19th-century saint Ramakrishna. He was instrumental in teaching Indian ideas of Vedanta and Yoga to the Western world and is recognized for fostering interfaith consciousness by elevating Hinduism to the status of a major world religion in the late 19th century. He was a significant influence in the resurgence of Hinduism in India and helped to the notion of nationalism during the colonial period. Vivekananda established the Ramakrishna Math and the Ramakrishna Mission. He is most renowned for his inspirational address that commenced with, "Sisters and brothers of America..." whereby he presented Hinduism before the Parliament of the World's Religions in Chicago in 1893. Ramakrishna Paramahansa is said to have influenced Narendra's character and equipped him to devote his life to humanitarian service. Following Ramakrishna's demise, Narendra and his fellow monastic disciples founded

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their inaugural monastery in Baranagar. This is the message of Advaita Vedanta, a Hindu teaching inspired by Ramakrishna, the leader of the Hindu revival of the 19th century, which was successfully communicated at the Parliament of the World Religions, which started on September 23, 1893, in Chicago, by his outstanding disciple Vivekananda, and thus the great spread of the Ramakrishna movement among people in the United States began. Four Yogas were also included in the message of this movement. The two men then established the Ramakrishna Mission and started Ramakrishna Math to support this message. Both organisations have worked together over the years to spread what is popularly known as the Ramakrishna Order, and that heritage still reverberates with the Western world and the Indian population currently. On September 23, 1893, before the Parliament started, a little-known monk called Vivekananda, an American, became an overnight sensation, and before the end of 1893, he would give a lecture and conduct seminars across America and England, and then again from 1899 to 1902. In 1901, Vivekananda delivered two lectures in New York and England about Ramakrishna which were later compiled in a book titled *My Master*. Vivekananda said—“All that I am, all that the world itself will someday be, is owing to my Master, Sri Ramakrishna.”

Narendranath Datta (later Swami Vivekananda) was first introduced to Sri Ramakrishna, the well-known mystic, at the home of Surendranath Mitra in Calcutta in November of 1881. This marked a historic event in the life of Narendranath which saw him being spiritually initiated and thereby making an impact globally. Narendranath was an excellent young pupil, intensely interested in philosophical and religious problems. He heard about Ramakrishna and wanted to understand why he was famous as being enthralled with the gods. Narendranath sang melodiously and appealed to Ramakrishna at the house of Mitra. He invited the young man to visit him at the Dakshineswar Kali Temple where he was a priest. It was a remarkable spiritual encounter between the two during their first encounter at Dakshineswar. Narendranath was a sharp-minded, critical thinker and, at first, it seemed to him that Ramakrishna behaved in an extremely strange manner. However, he got deeply impressed by the fact that Ramakrishna not only believed in the existence of the divine experience, but he also was able to attain various spiritual states. On his part, Ramakrishna clearly recognized the immense potential in Narendranath. He saw him was a sympathetic soul, a seeker of truth, who yearned desperately toward spiritual knowing. The foundations of an important and life-changing relationship had their beginnings with their first encounter. Narendranath continued visiting Ramakrishna at Dakshineswar, gradually conquering his initially rather skeptical attitude and becoming increasingly drawn to the wisdom and spiritual influence of the mystic. All these experiences

made him value even more the world of spirituality, broke his intellectual convictions, which finally led him to the way of renunciation and devoted his whole life to the spiritual enlightenment technique.

That is how his travels as a monk enabled Vivekananda to observe the horrors of poverty, social inequality and religious diversity in India. He was imbibed with a strong attitude of pity to the misery of the masses and a burning desire to exalt the masses through these experiences. It was also through his travels that he better understood the spiritual heritage of India and how it could be revived. These journeys were crucial in shaping his worldview and whatever he would learn during these journeys played a crucial role in the speeches that he would make later in his life. Simply put, it is during such conquests in India that Swami Vivekananda was able to develop his vision and mission as he grew into a potent instrument of spiritual awakening as well as social reform. Kaushal Goyal says:

In August 1888 Narendra's first destination was Varanasi, where he visited the places where Gautama Buddha and Adi Shankara preached and met Bengali writer Bhudev Mukhopadhyay and Hindu saint Trailanga Swami. After meeting Swami Vivekananda, Mukhopadhyay said, "Such vast experience and insight at such an early age! I am sure he will be a great man." Narendra also met Sanskrit and Vedic scholar Babu Pramadadas Mitra, with whom he corresponded on the interpretation of Hindu scriptures. After leaving Varanasi, he visited Ayodhya, Lucknow, Agra, Vrindavan, Hathras and Rishikesh. When he was staying in Vrindavan, one day, he saw a man smoking a hookah. He asked the man to give him a tobacco bowl, but the man refused to do so explaining he was a man of lower caste. Narendra initially accepted his point and started walking, but within few minutes, he started feeling ashamed, as he had been practising 'non-duality of soul' for a long time. He returned to the man, once again requested him to give him tobacco bowl and despite the man's reluctance, he took the hookah from him and started smoking. (Goyal, PP.45-46)

Swami Vivekananda's teachings and philosophy form a comprehensive and dynamic system that addresses both the spiritual and material needs of humanity. He sought to bridge the gap between ancient wisdom and modern challenges, offering a path to individual and collective transformation. Vivekananda was a passionate exponent of Advaita Vedanta, a school of Hindu philosophy that posits the non-dualistic nature of reality. He emphasized the concept of Brahman, the ultimate, formless, and all-pervading reality. The key point here is that the soul of a person (Atman), is the same as Brahman. This is the secret of liberation (Moksha). He understood Advaita Vedanta in such a manner that it can be applied to contemporary life with emphasis on implementing Advaita in everyday life. The first and most basic message of

Vivekananda is that all human beings are divine in nature. He also dismissed the idea of man being sinful or imperfect and made the claim that divine capability lies within every human being. It is this belief that had underpinned his message of self-reliance, self-respect and self-confidence. He encouraged people to perceive and express their inner divinity by doing the righteous and practicing spirituality. He emphasized how everything was intertwined and that all of existence is united. This was what made him preach universal love, compassion, and service to human beings. He thought that we can unite against prejudice, hatred and division by seeing the divine in others. Vivekananda was a defender of the notion that all religions are essentially ways of arriving at the same ultimate reality. He underlined the unity of various religions, promoting tolerance, respect towards each other, and interfaith communication. Sisters and brothers of America, his well-known saying at the Parliament of Religions demonstrates his inclusiveness and Universalism approach. Vivekananda did not feel that there is pure theoretical or abstract philosophy.

He stressed the need to apply the Vedanta principles in our day-to-day lives, and transform them into a practical instrument of individual and social change. He promoted the notion of Practical Vedanta (perceiving the divine in all beings, and serving them as the embodiment of God). This caused him to focus on social service, education and the upliftment of the depressed. He believed that one could worship through selfless service to humanity and could express the divine within through this. His idea of the Daridra Narayana (God in the poor) highlighted his proposition that serving the poor is serving God. His selfless service has been the idea behind the Ramakrishna Mission that he founded. Vivekananda realized the importance of education in the regeneration of the country and empowering the individual. His beliefs and philosophy supported both the concept of a learning system that conveys knowledge and also develops character and strength of mind and self-reliance. He was of the opinion that people should be taught to deal with the problems of life and help to improve the conditions of the society. And he demanded strongness, physical and mental, as the necessary attributes of individual and national development. He encouraged people to shake off fear, weakness and self-doubt and the value of courage and determination. His well-known cry of action is Arise, awake, and stop not till the goal is attained. Vivekananda was a great nationalist who wanted to revive the spiritual and cultural background of India. He believed that India had a unique role to play in the world, offering its spiritual wisdom to a humanity in need. He called upon the youth of India to dedicate themselves to the service of the nation, working to uplift the poor and downtrodden. He wanted to see a melding of western scientific advancement, with the eastern

spiritual base. Swami Vivekananda's teachings offer a holistic and practical approach to life, integrating spiritual wisdom with social responsibility.

Swami Vivekananda has some powerful messages to convey to the modern youth for building their characters and for transforming their personalities. In this regard let us see the following three quotations:

- (i) 'Of all Incarnations Lord Chaitanya was the greatest, but he was comparatively lacking in knowledge; in the Ramakrishna Incarnation there is knowledge, devotion and love—infinite knowledge, infinite love, infinite work, infinite compassion for all beings.' (Swami Vivekananda's Works, 320)
- (ii) 'Neither numbers nor powers nor wealth nor learning nor eloquence nor anything else will prevail, but purity, living the life, in one word, anubhuti, realization. Let there be a dozen such lion-souls in each country, lions who have broken their own bonds, who have touched the Infinite, whose whole soul is gone to Brahman, who care neither for wealth nor power nor fame, and these will be enough to shake the world.' (Swami Vivekananda's Works)
- (iii) 'Material science can only give worldly prosperity, whilst science is for eternal life..The foolery of materialism leads to competition and undue ambition and ultimate death, individual and national.' (Swami Vivekananda's Works,391)

Swami Vivekananda's poetry is a beacon of light for those seeking purpose, courage, and spiritual clarity. His verses awaken the sleeping soul, reminding us of our divine nature and our duty to uplift others. Whether calling for fearless action or meditative reflection, his poetry bridges the inner and outer worlds—uniting personal growth with national service. Even today, Vivekananda's poetic legacy continues to inspire students, seekers, and leaders to live with strength, compassion, and truth. His words are not just remembered—they are lived.

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