

The Roaring Fire
Swami Vivekananda
A Litterateur

PANCHU GOPAL BAKSI



PUNASCHA
PUBLISHER

Phone PBX
(033) 2654-1144/1180
(033) 2654-9581/9681
FAX (033) 2654-4346
Email rumho@belurmath.org
Website : www.belurmath.org



RAMAKRISHNA MISSION
(The Headquarters)
P.O. BELUR MATH, DIST. HOWRAH
WEST BENGAL 711202
INDIA

INTRODUCTION

Swami Vivekananda was a multi-faceted personality—a great spiritual teacher, who ceaselessly worked for the good of all. Whatever he said or did was directed not only for the salvation of India, but also for the removal of suffering all over the world. Above all, his goal was to see that all human beings could attain the knowledge of their divine nature. Swamiji's message, therefore, was not for one period of time, but for all times; not for one country, but for all countries.

In India, many people are drawn to Swamiji because of his great love of his country. To them he was a 'patriot-saint'—he was more an awakener of India than an awakener of souls. But to the devotees and admirers of Swamiji the world over, the story is different. Their joyful discovery of his message is an endless source of strength, courage, and inspiration, and this is why they love him.

It is well known that his name first became prominent in 1893 when he attended the Chicago Parliament of Religions. Since then through his rousing message of man-making and character building—a message that cuts across religions and races—he has been a source of inspiration to people all over the world in their endeavour to better human life in every aspect. Recognized as a global spiritual teacher with deep humanistic concern, he has been imperceptibly leading human beings as much after his demise as he did when he was alive, a born leader that he was.

When Sri Ramakrishna said, "Naren will teach," it was essential that he himself trained and made him fit for his work. Further, Vivekananda drank from the streams of English literature when he was a student and at the same time he stuck to the cultural and spiritual moorings of her motherland.

Wherever he went he spoke with utmost sincerity. He became one with his listeners, and entered into their skin as it were. He brought them joy and hope. He was a powerful orator and a master of a vigorous style as a writer of prose and poetry in English and Bengali.

We know of the tremendous impact that Vivekananda created when he addressed the audience in the Parliament of Religions as 'Sisters and Brothers of America'. We are told that when he spoke thus, there arose a peal of applause that lasted for several minutes. He was 'an orator by divine right'. Among the many tributes paid to him on this occasion, one that deserves quoting is that by the famous poetess Harriet Monroe. She records in her autobiography: 'But the handsome monk in the orange robe gave us in perfect English a masterpiece. His personality, dominant magnetic; his voice, rich as a bronze-bell; the controlled fervour of his feelings; the beauty of his message to the Western world he was facing for the first time—these combined to give us a rare and perfect moment of supreme emotion. It was human eloquence at its highest pitch.' Even if there is an over-statement in it, this sums up Vivekananda the orator.

Similarly Miss Kate Sanborn, a popular American writer of rural literature, got an inkling of roaring fire in Vivekananda when they were travelling together from Vancouver to Chicago. She writes: "Most of all was I impressed by the monk, a magnificent specimen of manhood ... with a lordly, imposing stride, as if roused or dance with merriment if the conversation amused him.... He spoke better English than I did, was conversant with ancient and modern literature, would quote easily and naturally from Shakespeare or Longfellow or Tennyson, Darwin, Muller, Tyndall; could repeat pages of our Bible, was familiar with and tolerant of all creeds. He was an education, an illumination, a revelation."

Mrs. John J Bagley, whose husband was the former two-term governor of the state of Michigan, hosted Vivekananda at her residence in Detroit. She was so much fascinated by this charming guest that she wrote to her friend, "...He is a strong, noble human being, one who walks with God. He is as simple and trustful as a child.... Whenever he spoke, people listened gladly and said, 'I have never heard man speak like that.' He does not antagonize, but lifts people up to a higher level.... Every human being would be made better by knowing him.... I want everyone in America to know Vivekananda, and if India has more such, let her send them to us." The fact is that he was a born orator; he knew what he was saying and that in a masterly way. Apart from the fact that he had a wonderful command of the English language, and his voice was musical and his logic penetrating, his saffron robes created a devastating effect. The other basic point was that he not only talked about the grand truths of his religion but also

talked of the shortcomings in their practical application. He had a great respect for other people's religions too. To him religion was life and not mere thought. It had to be lived.

One great illustration of his eloquence we find when he was presented an address of welcome in Kolkata, when he returned from the West. This address was presented to the Swami in a silver casket who replied in a speech that has become famous as a masterpiece of oratory and of fervent patriotism. It marked him out as the 'Prophet of Modern India'. He had defined in a new form the whole scope of Indian consciousness and had given birth to entirely new ideas of national and public life.

When Swamiji told he had no credentials to speak at the upcoming Parliament of Religions in Chicago, John Henry Wright, a professor of Greek at Harvard University, replied, "To ask you Swami, for your credentials is like asking the sun to state its right to shine!" Prof. Wright wrote to the chairman of the committee for selection of delegates, "Here is a man who is more learned than all our learned professors put together." Such was the scintillating personality of the Swami.

Now let us study Swamiji as a writer. We find he had this trait from his younger days. According to Romain Rolland, somewhere between the years 1881 and 1884, Swami Vivekananda, as the young Narendranath Datta, exchanged correspondence with the world famous English philosopher-sociologist Herbert Spencer (1820-1903). Narendranath wrote to Spencer for permission to translate his book on *Education* into Bengali for his publisher Gurudas Chattopadhyaya. The young Naren challenged one of his ideas and "Spencer was astonished, so it was said, by his daring criticisms, and admired the precociousness of his philosophical intellect."

Swami Vivekananda wrote hundreds of letters which show the plan of his work and the means he wanted to adopt for the fulfillment of his divine mission. These letters contain hints for the present and future workers for the cause of India as to how the nation should be guided. Since he was conscious of his own divinity, he wanted that others should also rise to the full stature of their divinity.

Vivekananda was a dynamic personality and a fiery soul. We can imagine what magnetic effects his letters had upon the life of those to whom they were addressed. His letters contain many passages, a single one of which is sufficient to bring about a great revolution and

complete transformation in one's life. The same fire is hidden in them even now, though they were written more than hundred years ago. There is no doubt that this smouldering fire may be ablaze at any time and illumine any life in any clime. His letters are also worth quoting as specimens of literary excellence. I quote one or two which in pathos, depth and sincerity he wrote to Hale sisters or Miss MacLeod: "I have bundled my things and am waiting for the deliverer. Shiva, Shiva, carry my boat to the other shore..." "After all, Joe, I am only the boy who used to listen with rapt wonderment to the wonderful words of Ramakrishna under the banyan at Dakshineswar. That is my true nature; works, activities, doing good and so forth are all superimpositions. Now I again hear his voice; the same old voice thrilling my soul."

Again some articles viz. *Aryans and Tamilians*, *The Problem of Modern India and Its Solution*, *The Education that India Needs*, etc. are a few among many of his prose writings which have a literary flair and are models of literary essays which have a permanent value. His historical knowledge was both profound and extensive. Although he wrote only a few short essays on historical subjects, his penetrating insight into the historical evolution is revealed in numerous passages throughout his speeches and writings. On language his ideal was unequivocal: "Simplicity is the secret. My ideal of language is my Master's language, most colloquial and yet expressive. It must express the thought which is intended."

The literary gifts of Vivekananda are best judged by his writings in Bengali. These are not voluminous, as he wrote mostly in English. These are *Vartman Bharat* (Modern India), *Parivrajaka* (Memoirs of European Travel), *Prachya O Paschatya* (The East and the West), *Bhabbar Katha* (Points to Ponder), and some of his letters and poems in Bengali. Apart from the rich store of thought and information contained in these, they are remarkable for the simple colloquial language in which they were written. It was then the general impression that serious topics could not be discussed in colloquial language. He showed that such a thing was possible. It was the great poet Rabindranath Tagore who first appreciated the merit of the new Bengali style introduced by Swamiji. He cited Swamiji's *Prachya O Paschatya* as a model for showing how colloquial Bengali can be made a living and forceful language.

In addition to the Harvard address on *Vedanta Philosophy*, the *Karma Yoga*, *Bhakti Yoga*, *Raja Yoga*, and *Jnana Yoga* are Swamiji's four

outstanding contributions to philosophical literature. They show such a depth of understanding and mode of presentation in simple language that they rank as classics and would have brought him name and fame in this line alone. He has narrated the stories of Sita and Savitri, Ramayana, Mahabharata, or of Vilvamangal with a telling effect.

Now let us take Vivekananda the poet. Some of his English poems also have reached a sublimity of no mean order. The best is 'Kali the Mother,' which depicts the divine aspect of terror and destruction in a noble and beautiful poetic imagery. Sister Nivedita gives us a graphic picture of how he wrote this poem in a fever of inspiration. Filled with the sublime experience, he wrote to the last word: the pen fell from his hand and he dropped on the floor, losing consciousness, while his soul soared into highest state. A few others like 'My Play is Done', 'Song of the Sannyasin', 'Hold on yet a While' are also praiseworthy poems. His 'Complete Works' run into nine volumes, but the corpus of his writings and speeches is so overwhelming in depth and magnitude that his identity as a poet has almost been lost to the readers. He is often remembered for his nationalistic and philosophic lectures.

Going through the works of Swami Vivekananda, Romain Rolland, the French biographer, writes: "His words are great music, phrases in the style of Beethoven, stirring rhythms like the march of Handel Choruses, I cannot touch these sayings of his ... without receiving thr'ill through my body like an electric shock. And what shocks ... must have been produced when in burning words they issued from the lips of the hero!"

Swami Vivekananda did not cross forty. In about nine years from 1893 to 1902, the most meaningful and active years, he did an extensive preaching work and put Ramakrishna Mission on a sound basis. He had neither the time nor the scope to devote himself to the pursuit of a career as a poet or a writer. He was basically a saint, a spiritual teacher and an interpreter of Vedanta. His occasional writings of poems and articles were purely the consequence of an individual's urge for self-expression. He himself said: "I was born for the life of a scholar—retired, quiet, poring over my books. But the Mother dispenses otherwise—yet the tendency is there." He knew he will not live long. In his letter written in October 1898 from Lahore, he wrote: "I have three years more to live, and the only thought that disturbs me is whether I shall be able to give effect to all my ideas within this period." At the same time, the poet in him gives an expression to his inner

feelings through the following stanza:

'Listen, friend, I will speak my heart to thee
I have found in my life this truth supreme,
Buffeted by waves, in this whirl of life,
There's one ferry that takes across the sea.'

This almost forms the refrain in most of his speeches and writings, calling upon man to seek God. Similarly, he exhorts in his poem 'To a Friend' that God is there in His manifold forms before everyone, but we, in our ignorance, cannot see him:

'There are His manifold forms before thee,
Rejecting them, where seekest thou for God.
Who loves all beings, without distinction,
He indeed is worshipping best his God.'

While in America, he said: "Never forget the glory of Human Nature! We are the Greatest God. ... Christs and Buddhas are but waves on the boundless Ocean which I am." In all his writings and speeches, we constantly find that he speaks of the Divine in Man at its best. His religion was for the man. He believed that religion was of no avail if it 'cannot wipe out widow's tears or bring a piece of bread to the orphan's mouth.' In fact, inspired by his liberal socialistic humanism, he confessed that 'religion is not for empty bellies.' He also said, 'If you want to find God, serve man.'

Belur Math,
September 7, 2016

Swami Bodhasarananda
Asst. Secy. Ramakrishna Math
and Ramakrishna Mission
Belur Math, Howrah
Formerly Adhyaksha, Advaita Ashrama
Mayavati, Champawat, Uttarakhand

CONTENTS

Chapter 1	The background at a glance	15
Chapter 2	The Swami's bent for literature	23
Chapter 3	Prose-writings of Swamiji	28
Chapter 4	Poems of Swamiji	57
Chapter 5	Miscellaneous [Journals, Epistles, Translation, Lectures etc.]	81
Chapter 6	Salient features of Swami Vivekananda's literature	123
Chapter 7	Influence of the life and literature of Swami Vivekananda	136
	GLOSSARY	169
	INDEX	178
	REFERENCES	182

The content of this book was partially published in the PRABUDDHA BHARATA or AWAKENED INDIA, a prestigious monthly journal of the Ramakrishna order started by Swami Vivekananda in 1896.

THE BACKGROUND AT A GLANCE

Had Shakespeare cared to turn his mind to, he would have been a Newton, as it is said, Swami Vivekananda, if he would, could have been either. His struggle to accomplish the task bestowed upon him by his Gurudeva at the cost of his life, profound wisdom, vast experience in human life, tenacious exploration of the Truth, mastery exposition of the Vedanta-Science attribute the Swami to an ambidexter— an artist and scientist; a general and pathfinder.

Swamiji was a child of an age of transition. It was a period of social and religious reforms in the wake of Renaissance or new-awakening characterized by liberal ideas, sense of reasoning and judgement, humanity, new aspirations for the future and critical outlook on the rituals and beliefs in vogue, and zeal for reform and progress. Rammohan Roy (1774-1833) a lion amongst men pioneered the new spirit— the modern age in India. He was a staunch believer in the Vedanta and an adherent of the European Epistemology, sociology and politics. He accepted the meticulously refined form of the old tradition and practices only after analyzing those in the light of the Vedanta, rationalism and realism.

As the first great exponent of English education Rammohan made a spirited protest against the establishment of Sanskrit college to the Governor General Lord Amherst, "The Sanskrit system of education would be the best calculated to keep this country in darkness if such

had been the policy of the British legislature. But as the improvement of the native population is the object of the Government, it will consequently promote a more liberal and enlightened system of instruction, embracing mathematics, natural philosophy, Chemistry and anatomy, with other useful sciences which may be accomplished with the sum proposed, by employing a few gentlemen of talents and learning educated in Europe, and providing a college furnished with the necessary books, instruments and other apparatus." Besides the missionaries David Hare and he took the initiative in establishing several English schools, including the Hindu College (later on developed into the Presidency College).

In 1828 Rammohan who wore the sacred thread of the Brahmanas up to his death and regarded himself as a Hindu; established a theistic organization called Brâhma Sabhâ — an assembly of all who believed in the unity of one God and discarded the worship of idols with elaborate rituals. He translated the old scriptures of the Hindus and those of the Muslims in Bengali, Arabic, Persian and English so that people might learn the teachings of their respective religion and deviations derived from their deep-rooted ignorance and superstitions. Those publications helped much in the development of Bengali language.

Rammohan, risking his neck, fought against the orthodox Hindus led by Raja Radhakanta Dev for the abolition of self-immolation of widows and thanks to him and Governor-General Lord William Bentinck the historic Regulation XVII which declared *Sati* illegal and punishable by courts was passed on 4th Dec 1829. He was opposed other various social abuses namely polygamy and advocated re-marriage of widows under specific circumstances (chiefly due to the efforts of Roy and 'Brahma Samaj of India' led by Keshab Chandra Sen the Government passed the Act III of 1872 which sanctioned widow marriages and inter-caste marriages for those who did not profess any recognized faith such as Hinduism and Islam, and abolished polygamy and early marriage of girls.); fixation of maximum rent to be paid by each farmer under permanent settlement, liberty of

the press (as a result Sir Charles Metcalfe, Governor-General of India withdrew all restrictions on the press in 1835), Indianisation of the British-Indian Army, substitution of English for Persian as the official language of the court of law, consultation with the Indian leaders before enactment of new laws, separation of the offices of judge and magistrate, trial by jury and codification of civil and criminal laws.

The fundamental principles of Rammohan's politics involved his love of freedom and firm belief in the capability of the Indians as the Europeans for progress. He chalked out the outline of political movement in a constitutional manner for the attainment of political rights inevitable for the national development. This brief sketch of Rammohan Roy may be concluded with the eulogy of his biographer Mrs. S.D. Collet : "He was the arch which spanned the gulf that yawned between ancient caste and modern humanity, between ancient superstition and science, between despotism and democracy, between immobile custom and a conservative progress, between polytheism and theism."²

Iswar Chandra Vidyâsâgar, a competent successor to Rammohan took up the herculean task of rousing his countrymen from the stupor of ages. Of course, he as a great humanist was more concerned with the material life rather than the spiritual salvation of man and his views were almost similar to the Greek Hedonism, Comte's positivism and Bentham's Utilitarianism. He was a great champion of inducing the Government to legalise re-marriage of Hindu widows (July 16, 1856) and spreading education. He engaged himself in translating or writing original books (e.g. Varna-Parichay) for nearly fifty years (1847-1891) and thus enriched Bengali language with artistry and literary flavour. Sister Nivedita's reminiscence shows what a strong impression the two great reformers Rammohan and Vidyâsâgar had left on her master :

"It was here (Naini-Tal) too, that we heard a long talk on Ram Mohun Roy, in which he pointed out three things as the dominant notes of this teacher's message— his acceptance of the Vedanta, his preaching of patriotism and the love that embraced the Mussulman

equally with the Hindu. In all these things he claimed himself to have taken up the task that the breadth and foresight of Ram Mohun Roy had mapped out.

... And now (during morning talks at Al-mora) of the pundit Vidyâsâgar he exclaimed, "There is not a man of my age in Northern India on whom his shadow has not fallen!"

"The Swami introduced Vidyâsâgar to us now as 'the hero of widow-remarriage, and of the abolition of polygamy.' But his favourite story about him was of that day when he went home from the Legislative Council, pondering over the question of whether or not to adopt English dress on such occasions....And Vidyâsâgar ... determined to stick to the chudder, dhoti and sandals, not even adopting coat and slippers.

"We could believe that a man, who was able to discredit polygamy by moral force alone, was 'intensely spiritual'. And it was wonderful indeed to realize the Indian indifference to a formal creed, when we heard how this giant was driven by the famine of 1864— when 1,40,000 people died of hunger and disease— to have nothing more to do with God, and become entirely agnostic in thought."³

The second half of the nineteenth century witnessed certain remarkable happening in the arena of literature and culture of Bengal and those included introduction of the first 'epicizing' (as has been said by the poet himself) 'Meghanadbadh Kavya' (1861) and first romantic lyrical poems 'Atmabilap' (self-lamentation) and 'Bangabhasar Prati' (To Bengali language) in 1861 by Madhusudan Dutta; composition of lyric poetry enriched with 'an extraordinary development of imaginative sensibility' (the phrase coined by Herford in 'The Age of Wordsworth') and 'intense personal emotion' accompanied with the awareness of miserable plight of the masses by Biharilal Chakrevarty, Akshay Kumar Baral, Govindachandra Das, Rabindranath Tagore and so on; the first successful novel 'Alaler gharer Dulal' (1858) by Pyrichand Mitra; introduction of colloquial Bengali and sarcastic criticism of waywardness and adultery of the contemporary civic society of Kolkata in "Hutom Panchar Naksha"

(1862) by Kaliprasanna Sinha; writing of intellectual essays by Rajendralal Mitra, Maharsi Devendranath Tagore, Rajnarayan Basu, Akshay Kumar Dutta; production of dramas and farces by Ramnarayana Tarkaratna (author of his magnum opus 'Kulinkulasarvaswa' 1854), Madhusudan Dutta (Sharmistha' 1859), "Padmavati' 1860, 'Krishnakumari' 1861 and two farces— Ekei ki Bale Sabhyata 1860 on blind imitation, addiction to drinking and moral corruption of the 'Young Bengal' led by Henry Louis Vivian Derezio who was accused by westernizing the youth of Bengal and 'Budo Shalikhher Ghade Ron' 1860 to whip religious imposter and lascivious aged men like Bhaktaprasad), Dinabandhu Mitra (Nil Durpan 1860 on the brutal torture of the indigo-planters on the farmers and middle class men that led to the historic movement as 'Uncle Tom's Cabin' 1852 by Mrs. Stoe did. 'Sadhabar Ekadashi' 1866), Upendranath Roy ('Surendra-Binodini' 1875, a scene of this drama on an attempt of a European Magistrate to outrage a Bengali woman's chastity persuaded the Government to arrest the playwright, director, actors and actress bringing charges of obscenity and sedition against them and to enact Dramatic Performance Act in 1876 to bring the stage under control.), Girishchandra Ghosh (dramatist, director, actor producer and founder of the National Theatre on 7 Dec. 1872 followed by Star Theatre, Minarbha Theatre, Classic Theatre etc— the doyen of the dramatic movement in Bengal), arrival of Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay (a prolific author of fourteen novels namely, 'Durgeshnandini' 1865, 'Kapalkundala' 1866. 'Anandamath' 1884, 'Devi Chowdhurani' 1884, 'Sitaram' 1887 etc and a number of essays rich in evocative ideas and intellectual analysis in his journal 'Bangadarshan' 1872 above all, composer of the inspiring song 'Bande Mataram').

The second half of the nineteenth century experienced social and religious reformation movement in diverse channels – extreme radical forces lured by the western ideas and to this reaction orthodox group and between the two extremes moderate section.

It is interesting to note that Rammohan's advocacy of Western education and ideas was accepted by the Prârthanâ Samâj in Maharashtra. It owes much to Keshab Chandra Sen for its establishment (1857) and to Justice Mahâdev Govinda Ranade for