

Swami Vivekanand Recognized As the Pioneer of Saints Poetry

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Abstract

Swami Vivekananda is known mostly as a spiritual icon of India. But many of us only know about his eloquent lectures on Hindu philosophy. But to know him only in this reference is to know only a small measure of his true power and greatness. Vivekananda, the man of the world, the friend, the patriot, the loving master, the desperate seeker of knowledge comes out more profoundly in his poetic utterances. The poet's varied mood, reflected in his poetry, displays the vivacity and eloquence of a master artist. While it brings out the spiritual quest of a monk on the one hand, it also expresses, the conflicting feelings and emotions of a man thrown into the material World, on the other. No other poet of his time stands out so distinctly in his rumination over life and death. His most brilliant flashes of eloquence and his utterance of profound wisdom are all poured and moulded into shape in his rare poetry. The significance of this great Sannyasi's poetry lies in its relevance to his own and our time. Even after a whole century has passed, the values of culture and moral philosophy propagated by him, above all, those of life which he holds out for the harmony of the Eastern and Western world invites a fresh reading of his poetry. The objective of this paper is to bring to light his poems which are filled with spiritual content.

Keywords

mythology, mysticism, spirituality, cultural heritage, quest

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The tradition of saint poetry commences from the hoary ages of the Vedas, the Upanishads, and the great epics- the Ramayana and the Mahabharata which were composed by the rishis embodying the rich spiritual heritage of India. Their profound words, infused with radiant wisdom, have been shaping Indian literature for centuries. The Vedas and the Upanishads were composed by Ved Vyas and Valmiki, who are considered the pioneers of saintly poetry. Unlike other literary traditions, Indian literature has been blessed with the divine blessings and poetic genius of the saints, which have greatly enhanced the rich heritage of saint poetry. Indian literature in English is enriched by poets and saints such as Swami Vivekananda, Swami Ram Tirtha, Sri Aurobindo, and Paramhansa Yoganand. Swami Vivekananda is considered a pioneer in the realm of spiritual poetry. His poetry is infused with Hindu beliefs and the profound philosophy of Advaita Vedanta, which offers a practical and dynamic perspective that can transcend boundaries and influence the entire world. His literary works, including poems, songs, and hymns, are imbued with mysticism, spiritual aspirations, artistic creativity, and prayers for peace, love, meditation, yoga, brahma, shiva, goddess Kali, and liberation of the soul. His music and lyrics are deeply influenced by the Vedantic philosophy of India, which has a history as ancient as the Vedas. It was Vivekananda who stood alone on the global platforms, holding a placard with the symbol of Hinduism and captivating the entire world. What the world needed was unwavering belief that had no fear of doubt. It was found in the words, poems, and writings of Swami Vivekananda alone. He was a great mystic, yogi, monk, and saint who heralded the birth of the Renaissance in India took us back to the fundamental values of our Hindu culture and appealed to find the truth in the Upanishads and the Bhagavad Gita. In a poem called "My Play is Done" written in the spring of 1895 in New York, he shows his feeling of returning home. Here 'home' is not in its literal sense, rather a complete freedom from the cycle of birth and death. Like Keats, he sees through the outward show of pomp and gaiety of this life and writes:

"Where life is living death, alas! and death-Who knows but it's
Another start, another round of this old wheel of grief and bliss?
Where children dream bright, golden dreams, too soon to find the dust,
And aye look back to hope long last and life a mass of rust."
The process of living from day to day,
"Tis nothing but delusion's toy" for him which is further elaborated with
the symbol of a 'wheel':
"False hope is motor; desire, nave; its spokes are grief and joy."

Quite unlike Keats, he affirms his faith in 'God the Mother' and prays to her:

"My play is done, O mother, break my chains and make me free!"

In another poem, "The Hymn of Creation" Vivekananda's account of the creation of the Universe is very lofty and mysterious. He writes like a saint:

"Death was not then, nor immortality,
The Night was neither separate from the day,
But motionless did That vibrate
Alone, with Its own glory one_
Beyond That nothing did exist."

Man is bound by the Karma (Action) he performs, reaping positive or negative results in accordance with his karma. Such is the message of the Hindu scriptures. During his sojourn in New York on 16th May 1895 Vivekananda undergoes a lot of mental anguish after looking at the turbid ebb and flow of life, where "I feel my Karma's sway" and where:

"Love comes reflected back as love,
Hate breeds more fierce hate,
They mete their measures, lay on me
Through life and death their claim."

He is a seeker of eternal truth and cherishes to go beyond this sway of Karma and seeks his repose in his "Awakened soul":

"One only man, one only God, one ever perfect soul,
One only sage who ever scorned the dark dubious ways,
One only man who dared think and dared show the goal-
That death is a curse, and so is life and best when stops to be."

In his poem "Kali the Mother", it is none but 'Kali' the Mother who can confer the eternal peace and love. It is none but a 'merciful' mother who can unshackle the desire-ridden soul and take the soul 'to those shores where strife forever ceases.' One can mark out Swami ji's urge to the mother Kali to rescue from bonds of desires, delusion and Maya. He prays:

"Save me from this fire!
Rescue me, merciful mother, from floating with desire!
Turn not to me Thy awful face,
'tis more than I can bear,
Be merciful and kind to me,
O chide my faults forbear."

He again urges the Lord to guide and bless the life of man so that man may feel himself bathed in the divine light:

“More on, O Lord, in thy resistless path!
Till thy high noon overspreads the world
Till every land reflects thy light,
Till men and women, with uplifted heads,
Behold their shackles broken and know,
In springing joy, their life, renewed!”

To Vivekananda, all the religions of the world seem to be shrouded with mystery and their architectural and scriptural emblems form a ‘wild forest’ in which he feels like a lost child in search of ‘God’ as he records in his poem “Epistles”:

“In temple, church, and mosque
In Vedas, the Bible, an Al Koran
I had searched for Thee in vain.
Like a child in the wild forest lost.”

But this confusion and lost feeling ultimately leads to a Wordsworthian pantheistic vision and the poet finds ‘God’ in a prophetic moment in a flash of illumination in his heart of heart and he joyfully exclaims:

“And You are here, my love, my all!
And I was searching Thee!
From all eternity you were there
Enthroned in majesty!”

Finally, the poet’s affirmation of life through his awakening leads him to acknowledge the omnipresence in the voice of prophets and the songs of scriptures:

“Thou art my God with prophets old;
All creeds do come from Thee,
The Vedas, Bible, and Koran bold
Sing Thee in harmony.”

Vivekananda’s message in these poems is pretty clear. He emphasizes the ‘soul’ illuminating aspect of religion, its inspiration for a highly spiritual life as a seeker of the truth, the ‘God’.

Swami Vivekananda was deeply influenced by the Gita and the Vedas which are the replicas of mysticism and omnipresent, omnipotent, eternal, all-pervading, and beyond all the limits of the human mind. The wheel of Maya doesn’t let us realize the presence of God who can be felt in each whit of the universe. Prof. Satish Kumar says:

“ All poems of Vivekananda are imbued with mysticism of a very high order. In this respect, they reveal the influence of the Gita. It eloquently elucidates

the doctrine that God is eternal and all-pervading and as long as we are so swayed by Maya we fail to realize the presence of the Supreme within us. When true knowledge dawns on man he sheds false ego, all delusions, and all material attachments and possesses great peace, joy, and equipoise. He sees the Supreme, the indivisible in all fleeting manifestations of life, in all animated and inanimate objects. (A survey of Indian English poetry 28-29)

His poems are the revelation of the divine wisdom of Gita which propounds the Yogas of Bhakti, gyana, and Karma and his emphasis on the Karma Yoga imparts joy, absolute bliss and absolute peace to the avid readers and drenches them in the Rasa of Bhakti. After rigorous penance and Tapasya attained that celestial and eternal light that made him one with God:

“ In raptures 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.
Enthroned in majesty.”

A believer in the Gita considers the soul as immortal and the body as mortal and this admittance of the soul as invisible, immortal and impenetrable, makes him love his own self, and see the same self in all other objects.

To sum up, it is indisputably clear that the poetry of Swami Vivekananda is full of simplicity, genuineness, blissfulness, picturesqueness, harmony, music, and sublimity as well as it abounds in the noble teachings of the Vedas, the Gita, the Ramayana, Mahabharat, the Upanishads and the Puranas. His in-depth philosophy and spirituality make him as the precursor of Saint's poetry of the modern era.

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