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Swami Vivekananda's religious ideas and ideals: An analysis of his poem "the song of the free"

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Abstract

Love and hate, self and selflessness, good and bad, happiness and sorrow are the two sides of a coin called life. Life itself is mysterious and so is death. Religious ideas and ideals effulge the pure spirit or truth. They are the surest means to discover or re-discover the real self. The research paper makes an endeavour to analyse Vivekananda's religious ideas and ideals towards the goal through an analysis of his poem "The Song of the Free."

Keywords: Maya, enigmatic, 'that thou art', muscular Hinduism, advait, duality

Introduction

The ultimate goal of all religions is to attain freedom- freedom from untruth, freedom from all sorrows- and to get the direct experience of the Devine which can be understood as an immediate cognizance of the reality behind appearance. The sages of all ages went in search of the ultimate freedom; found it and paved the way to the aspirants to achieve the same. Swami Vivekananda's religious ideas and ideals, embodying great Indian philosophy of Advait Vedant prescribe the path to realise the Devine by overcoming all petty selfish considerations and breaking narrow walls of caste, creed, language, religion and others.

The great Indian tradition has the unending faith in the divinity of man. According to the Hinduism, a man forgets this divinity when comes under the influence of Maya, the illusion and forgets about his ultimate reality of pure spirit and pure energy. This spirit is one as the truth is one and so everything exists in the same spirit. Since separate existence cannot be possible so there can be no scope for contempt, separation or rejection. Only love can prevail for being the ultimate reality.

This world is only an enigmatic reflection of the reality and so seems true. Therefore, we need not afraid of anything. The only goal of the human life is the realisation of the ultimate truth through the realisation of one's true self.

It is only when the sense of the personal ego has become completely extinct that the great truth, 'that thou art' (tat-tvam-asi), and the illusoriness of the external world, become evident, and the identity of the Individual Self with the Supreme Self can be understood.

Nor angel I, nor man nor brute,
Nor body, mind, nor he nor she;
The books do stop in wonder mute
To tell my nature - I am He! ("The Song of the Free" 17-20)

- Something that he declares again in the last stanza:

From dreams awake, from bonds be free!
Be not afraid. This mystery,
My shadow cannot frighten me!
Know once for all that I am He! (41-44)

This knowledge empowers the believer to surmount all obstacles in the path towards Truth and God:

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...still know, my soul,
You are Divine. March on and on,
Nor right nor left, but to the goal! (13-16)

These lines reflect Vivekananda's general philosophy of life, and not just his religious beliefs. As he exhorted the youth of the India of his time: "Arise, awake, and stop not till the goal is reached!" (Vivekananda, *To the Youth* 44). In fact, this is why a scholar like Ashis Nandy even sees in Vivekananda the representative of a kind of "muscular Hinduism" similar to the "muscular Christianity" popularized by the missionaries in the colonial period. Nandy suggests that Swami Dayanand Saraswati and Vivekananda:

Borrowed their fundamental values from the Western world view and, in spite of their image as orthodox revivalists, were ruthlessly critical of the Hindus. They also took the position that the Hindus had been great -- which meant, in their terms, virile and adult -- in ancient times and had fallen on bad days because of their loss of contact with...true Ksatriyahood. (Nandy 24)

Vivekananda's religious ideas, of course, were part of that long tradition of Hindu thought called Advaita philosophy. The conviction that all is atman is the rock on which the Advaitin takes his stand:

Know these are but the outer crust-
All space and time, all effect, cause,
I am beyond all sense, all thought.
The Witness of the Universe!
Not two nor many, 'tis but One
And thus in me all me's I have,
I cannot hate, I cannot shun
Myself from me - I can but love! (33-40)

When the atman is realised, the subject/object duality vanishes and a man becomes able to realise the ultimate truth; that is.

Before the sun, the moon, the earth,
Before the stars or comets free,
Before e'en Time has had its birth -
I was, I am, and I will be! (21-24)

This realisation is the ultimate goal of life, the gist of all holy-scriptures and the true freedom for which- according to Hinduism- a man takes birth on the earth.

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