

## Swami Vivekananda's Philosophy of Work and Its Relevancy with Modern Era

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### Abstract:

*We often wonder what would be the relevance of the message of a monk today, who was born more than 100 years ago, lived the life of a mendicant and left for his heavenly abode at a very young age of 39 years. In this paper, I would focus on the relevance of Swami Vivekananda's philosophy of work in modern era. Swami Vivekananda taught on both broad and very deep aspects (not restricted to India alone) encompassing Spiritualism, Universal values, Religion, Character building, Education, Spirit of Service and Social issues. Teachings and philosophy of Swami Vivekananda stressed on different aspects of religion, youth, education, faith, character building as well as social issues pertaining to India. His teachings influenced contemporaries, inspired innumerable followers and started off movements all over India. Swami Vivekananda symbolizes courage, boundless energy and fiery enthusiasm. Millions have been influenced just by his personality. His words ring true and shake people out of their passivity, laziness, weakness, Inertia and sufferings. The ideas of Swami ji have been seen through various eyes and new light has been thrown upon these ideas.*

**Keywords:** Life, work, youth, law, society, universal etc.

### I. INTRODUCTION

"We must do our duty for duty's sake, not for the hope of reward..." (Works IV, pp. 191). Today, one keeps seeing and reading about the achievements of hundreds of young people in practically all spheres of life. But India is a land of tremendous contradictions. On one hand, one sees such enormous prosperity and wealth, while, on the other hand, one-third of Indians go without a second meal every day. Finding solutions to the complex social, economic, infrastructural, political and poverty-related problems is indeed a great challenge for India. This challenge needs enormous energy, a fresh perspective, a grandiose vision and superhuman efforts. Demographically, the India of today is at its youngest best. According to Swami Vivekananda, Youth is that wonderful time in life when energy is limitless, human creativity is at its best and the 'never say die' spirit is at its peak. It is also an impressionable age wherein we try to model our life against that of a 'role model' or 'icon'. This is the time when one is ready to take on tasks however onerous they are; the time when our ideals can drive and determine one's actions; the time when we believe that we can do anything under the sun. This is the time when we are easily motivated by the environment and by what we see and value around us. . Imagine the potential energy in these millions of young Indians and you can then fathom the fact that we could face any challenge as a Nation. The only qualification that Swamiji wanted our youth to have was this wonderful ability to 'feel'. To those who wanted to go beyond just feeling and take to concrete action – he gave this potent mantra. These three words -Purity, Patience and Perseverance- are the qualities that every person desiring to do social work needs to possess. Purity means in thoughts, words and deeds. Patience

to understand the dynamics of any community development activity and the fact that Society is always slow to understand and quick to label all such efforts. "Purity in thought, speech and act is absolutely necessary for anyone to be religious..." (Works III, pp. 48). One also needs great perseverance to work in the complex settings of Indian society. To attain any goal, one needs to have clear vision and thought process about it and the most importantly should know how to carry out the plans in order to complete the target. Vivekananda realized a country's future depends on its people, so he mainly stressed on man, "...man-making is my mission..." (Lokeswarananda ed., pp. 1-2), that's how he described his teachings. Swami Vivekananda put forth how to do our work – any sort of work. He presented it not only in the little book, Karma Yoga, but in many other places throughout his recorded Works. Sister Christina writes about him: "...his was no case of abstract and prepared dissertation. Every thought was passion, every word was faith. Every lecture was a torrential improvisation..." (Narasimhaiah, pp. 43).

In this special Provisions supplement, we have collected most of these pieces of advice, which are classified into the following categories: general observations; our attitude towards the work itself; our conception of ourselves as workers; how to do our work; and our conception of our fellow workers.

### II. VIVEKANANDA'S PHILOSOPHY OF WORK

"Work, work, work- I care for nothing else. Work, work, work, even unto death!" (Works VI, pp. 400). Swami Ji

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laid stress that by work alone men may get to where Buddha got largely by meditation or Christ by prayer. He emphasized that doing work is not religion, but work done rightly leads to freedom. He further insisted that we have to work, for it is the only way to get out of Maya. Swami Vivekananda taught us that if you want to help a person never think what that person's attitude towards you should be. Even if only a handful of people work with perfect sincerity, holiness, gigantic intellect, then also the whole world will be revolutionized. The only thing is we should never leave doing work. He favored that you work best when you work for others. According to the teachings of Swami Ji, the ideal person is one who, in the midst of the greatest silence and solitude, finds the most intense activity and in the midst of the most intense activity finds the silence and solitude of the desert. So we should never blame the circumstances or the harsh situations but should find the smooth in adverse and continue doing the right task. "The calmer we are, the better for us, and the more the amount of work we can do..." (Works II, pp. 293).

### III. HIS CONCEPTION AS WORKER

"Blessed are we that we are ordered out here..." (Works I, pp. 103). Swami Vivekananda believed that the great thing is to have faith in oneself. "He works best who works without any motive, neither for money, nor for fame, nor for anything else; and when a man can do that, he will be a Buddha, and out of him will come the power to work in such a manner as will transform the world. This man represents the very highest ideal of Karma-yoga". (*Karma*, pp. 142-143)

We cannot believe in God until we believe in ourselves. In Vivekananda's own words, "Faith in us and Faith in god- this is the secret of greatness..." (Lokeswarananda ed., pp. 110-111). We should condemn none; if we can stretch out a helping hand, by all means we should do so. Many feel, but only a few can express. It is the power of expressing one's love and appreciation and sympathy for others that enables one person to succeed better in spreading the ideas than others. Even the greatest fool can accomplish a task if it is after his heart. But the intelligent one is he, who can convert every work into one that suits his taste. He pleaded to please everyone without being a hypocrite and without being a coward. "If I have to please the world, that will be injuring the world". (Ghosh, pp. 93)

### IV. HIS VIEWSON FELLOW WORKER

Swami Vivekananda realized three things are necessary to make every man great, every nation great: conviction of the powers of goodness, absence of jealousy and suspicion, and helping all who are trying to be and do well. He emphasized to have faith in man. If he is pursuing the false, it is because he cannot get the true. Put it in front of him and let him judge. "He who does the lower work is not therefore a lower man..." (Works I, pp. 103). If you do good at all, you do it to yourself; feel that the receiver is the higher one. You serve the other because you are lower than he, not because he is low and you are high. According to Swami Vivekananda, give as the rose gives perfume – because that is your nature.

### V. LAWS FOR A SUCCESSFUL WORK LIFE

He also advised and propagated to adopt few laws of life in order to live good life and achieve greater success at personal and professional level. These laws guide us to live out to the fullest.

#### 1. *Life is Beautiful:*

Swami Vivekananda suggested to believe in this world - that there is some meaning behind everything. "The sign of life is expansion..." (Works I, pp. 479). Everything in the world is good, holy and beautiful. If we see something evil, we should think that we do not understand it in the right light. Though life is obviously not a bed of roses but as we have loved roses despite of thorns, similarly we must love life with all its weal and woes.

#### 2. *It's The Way You Feel:*

He possessed the views that if we feel like Christ, we will be a Christ; and if we feel like Buddha, we will be a Buddha. According to him, it is feeling that is the life, the strength, the vitality, without which no amount of intellectual activity can reach God. He believed, "All knowledge and all powers are within. What we call power; secrets of nature and force are all within. All knowledge comes from the human soul. Man manifests knowledge, discovers it with himself, which is pre-existing through eternity..." (Ghosh, pp. 57-58)

#### 3. *Set Yourself Free:*

To Swami Vivekananda, the moment we realize that God is sitting in the temple of every human body, the very moment we are free from bondage, and everything that binds vanishes. "This freedom is the goal towards which we are all moving..." (Works II, pp. 256)

#### 4. *It's Your Outlook That Matters:*

He felt that it is our own mental attitude, which makes the world what it is for us. "Whatever you believe, that you will be..." (Works III, pp. 284). Our thoughts make things beautiful, our thoughts make things ugly. The whole world is in our own minds and we should learn to see things in the proper light. Those who grumble at the little thing that has fallen to their lot to do will grumble at everything. Always grumbling they will lead a miserable life. But those who do their duty putting their shoulder to the wheel will see the light, and higher and higher duties will fall to their share. Hence we should always try to seek good in everything.

#### 5. *Love Is The Law of Life*

Swami Vivekananda strongly believed that all love is expansion while all selfishness is contraction. "Love banishes all fear..." (Works VIII, pp. 154). It is above all conspiracy, plotting and egoism and what remains after your demise is the love that you spread and Love is therefore the only purest form of life.

#### 6. *Don't Play the Blame Game:*

To Swami ji, "Good and evil are everywhere and the balance is wondrously even; but above all, is the glorious soul of men everywhere which never fails to understand anyone who knows how to speak its own language..." (Works IV p. 312)

He suggested that we should condemn none: if we can stretch out a helping hand, by all means we should do so and if we cannot, we should pray for our brothers and sisters and let them go their own way. Swami Vivekananda told, if young boys and girls are encouraged and are not unnecessarily criticized all the time, they are bound to improve in time.

### **7. Help Others:**

“In helping the world we really help ourselves...” (Works I, pp. 80). Swami Vivekananda stressed that if our money helps a man to do good to others, it is of some value; but if not, it is simply a mass of evil, and the sooner it is got rid of, the better. We should utilize our wealth for some meaningful purpose, to serve the humanity, to help the mankind. According to Vivekananda, an important teaching he received from Ramakrishna was that Jiva is Shiva (each individual is divinity itself). So he stressed on Shiva Jnane, Jiva Seva, (to serve common people considering them as manifestation of God). According to Vivekananda, man is potentially Divine, so, service to man is indeed service to God.

### **8. Uphold Your Ideals:**

He prescribed that it is our duty to encourage everyone in his struggle to live up to his own highest idea, and strive at the same time to make the ideal as near as possible to the Truth. Swami Vivekananda compared human mind with a monkey who is always restless and incessantly active by his own nature. According to him an uncontrolled mind leads to all the negativities in life and a controlled mind saves us and frees us from such thoughts. So, he stressed on practice of concentration, as he felt there is no limit to the power of the human mind, the more concentrated it is, the more powerful it becomes. “The law of laws is concentration. First, concentrate all the nerve energies and all power lodged in the cells of the body into one force and direct it at will...” (Works IX p. 269)

Swami Vivekananda suggested not to do anything which disturbs the mind or makes it restless. To Swami Ji, “Mind is very fine matter; it is the instrument for manifesting Prana...” (Works VI, pp. 128)

### **9. Listen To Your Soul:**

Self education is the self knowledge, “education, education, education alone!” (Works IV p. 483). Swami Vivekananda emphasized that we have to grow from the inside out. None can teach us, none can make us spiritual. There is no other teacher but our own soul. It is the only light that can show us the right path to move on.

### **10. Be Yourself:**

According to Swami Vivekananda, the greatest religion is to be true to your own nature. To pretend to be someone else is to deceive yourself. We must be merciful towards those who are in misery; when people are happy, we ought to be happy; and to the wicked we must be indifferent. These attitudes will make the mind peaceful.

### **11. Think Different:**

He viewed that all differences in this world are of degree, and not of kind, because oneness is the secret of everything.

### **12. Learn Everyday:**

Swami Vivekananda proclaimed that the goal of mankind is to attain knowledge. We should try to grasp each piece of knowledge every moment... whatever comes across in our way. The world is ready to give up its secrets if we only know how to knock, how to give it the necessary blow.

### **13. You Have The Power:**

According to him, all the powers in the universe are already ours. It is we who have put our hands before our eyes and cry that it is dark. As he felt there is no limit to the power of the human mind, the more concentrated it is, the more powerful it becomes. If you think about disaster, you will get it. Brood about death and you hasten your demise. Think positively and masterfully, with confidence and faith, and life becomes more secure, more fraught with action, richer in achievement and experience. He put forth that fill the brain with high thoughts, highest ideals, place them day and night before you, and out of that great work will come.

### **14. Nothing Is Impossible:**

He felt that never think that there is anything impossible for the soul. It is the greatest heresy to think so. This is the only sin in the world to say that you are weak, or others are weak. Our soul is the strongest and it has all the power to conquer any sort of difficulties. To succeed we must have tremendous perseverance, tremendous will. He taught us to have that sort of energy, that sort of will, and asked us to work hard, so that we can reach the goal. He advised not to look back-but to see forward with infinite energy, infinite enthusiasm, infinite daring, and infinite patience and then alone can great deeds be accomplished. “Infinite perfection is in every man, though unmanifested...” (Works IV p. 247)

### **15. Be Truthful:**

To Swami Vivekananda everything can be sacrificed for truth, but truth cannot be sacrificed for anything. He laid stress on the words, Stand up, be bold, be strong and said that we should take the whole responsibility on our own shoulders, and know that we are the creator of our own destiny. All the strength and succor we want is within us. Therefore, we must make our own future. We are responsible for what we are, and whatever we wish ourselves to be, we have the power to make ourselves. What we are now has been the result of our own past actions, it certainly follows that whatever we wish to be in future can be produced by our present actions; so we have to know how to act. Vivekananda said that It will not do merely to listen to great principles. We must apply them in the practical field, turn into constant practice. “Habit is one’s second nature and habit is one’s first nature too. All that is in your nature is the result of your habit, and habit is the result of experience...” (Works IX p. 210)

We can take up Swami Vivekananda from any angle and try to show that a particular idea of his life is still useful for the betterment of the individual in society and the world at large. “His whole heart and soul was the burning epic of India and his great mind could visualize a connection where others only saw isolated facts...” (Ghosh, pp. 52). He so beautifully advised us to ‘Serve God in man’; all his philosophy so elegantly and simplistically packed into one statement,

in such simple and lucid language that makes it at once achievable and attractive to the mass. This ideal not only looks within the reach of each one of us but makes it so emotionally appealing and motivating to undertake. S.M Banerjee writes in an article captioned 'Vivekananda: Orator, Writer and Art Critic' published in the book '*Vivekananda-The Great Spiritual Teacher*': "His sayings and utterances are mines of literary gems, apart from their depth of philosophic content." (543)

## V. CONCLUSION

These are the few ideas on work methods and laws of life provided by Swami Vivekananda, which are much more relevant in present scenario. Understanding Swami Vivekananda and his message and putting it across to our people would be the simplest way in which we feel that we could address many of the problems that India is facing today. Each person could begin with himself; prepare himself for the work ahead by ensuring that his personality is well-shaped and rounded. He needs to ensure that his physical, mental, social and psychological faculties are well tuned to the work ahead.

Swami Ji had a genius for arresting words and burning phrases hammered out white hot in the forge of his soul so that they transpierced thousands. It may justly be said that Indian's destiny was changed by him, and that this teaching re-echoed throughout humanity. And at last this perusal comes to the conclusion that Vivekananda's philosophy of work is the need of the hour, because of its wider perspective and a universal dimension to it. Swami Vivekananda was not only a multi-faceted personality but was also far ahead of his times. Swami Ji understood the problems facing humanity. Through the cause and effect method he traced the problems and provided solutions which served beyond immediate relief and farther into the future. He was a social reformer, a nationalist, and a management specialist. His concern was to elevate human kind and subsequently conquer all environments and circumstances. These unique qualities made him a leader of the supreme kind. Any block to human progress was his concern and he brought his great mind and heart in pointing out the obstructions and thereby providing solutions to them.

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