

Transcendental and Spiritual Thoughts of Swami Vivekananda

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Abstract:

The present paper focuses on Swami Vivekananda's philosophy of transcendentalism and spiritualism. Swami was a great philosopher and social reformer of the 19th century. There was a great impact of Emerson, Thoreau, Whitman, and others on the mind of Swami Vivekananda. He entered American soil and encountered the Transcendental Movement which was based on an adapted and modified version of the "Transcendental Idealism". He visited many American transcendentalists and influenced by their transcendental and spiritual ideas. He addressed philosophical lessons to the people of the world through his lectures and writings.

Keywords: transcendentalism, religion, spiritualism, philosophy

Introduction

Swami Vivekananda was the most impressive figure of the parliament. He was known as the most learned person in the parliament of World Religions which was held from 11th September to 27th September 1893 in Chicago, USA. He has a charming, fascinating, courageous personality and strong spiritual power. Through his intellectual efforts and uncommon style, he dazzled the West. Transcendentalism was a philosophical movement that has a link with individualism. This movement started in the early 19th century and urged people to break free from the norms and follow their passions and aspirations. Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau were the pioneers of the transcendentalism movement. According to them, an individual should be just an individual and nature was a great teacher and guide to find what the person believed in and the way the person desired to follow in life.

What is Transcendentalism?

Transcendentalism is a philosophy influenced by the Hindu religion, which emphasizes the spiritual benefits to people of a period of deep thought instead of action. It means going beyond the limits of human knowledge and experiencing something, especially religious or special. American Transcendentalism is associated with the philosophical and religious opinions of intellectuals of New England in the 1800th century. Transcendentalism means not just a religion, but it is rather a spiritual philosophy that counters Empiricism and Rationalism. The origin of Transcendentalism is found in American history, with Emerson, who was a leader of the transcendental movement. In the Transcendental movement, the group of intellectuals found even their liberal religion too formal and rationalistic to fulfill their spiritual and emotional needs. Simply, the members of the movement sought to transcend the materialistic impulses of life and move from the rational to a spiritual realm.

The transcendentalist writers lead themselves in their lives where they did what their intuition advised them and did not abide by rules and expectations they did not believe in. Today, transcendentalism can be found all over modern culture. Today's writers very much exemplify the values and beliefs of the transcendentalists though it is done intentionally or not. They show how significant and innovative was the work of the original transcendentalists and what is the relevance of these ideals today.

Swami Vivekananda and Transcendentalism:

Swami Vivekananda was a Transcendentalist in the broader sense, but his views are not completely matched with the views of Emerson and others. The main idea is the divinity of the soul which covers both the Vedantist's and the Transcendentalist's views. Vivekananda and Emerson and others' views are similar because Emerson and Thoreau drew their inspiration from the Hindu scriptures. Thoreau and Emerson brightened their ideas and intellect in the stupendous and cosmological philosophy of the Bhagavat-Geeta and Swamiji bathed himself into the endless ocean of Hindu sacred books, with not only his intellect, but also his body, mind, and soul. Hence, his thoughts, therefore, go deeper as a result.

Swami Vivekananda was a voracious reader so he was not unknown to the concept of Transcendentalism long before coming to America. Regarding religion, Swamiji also emphasized getting knowledge by direct perception, which Emerson called “intuition” and declared superior to reason. According to Swamiji the truths of religion, as God and Soul, cannot be perceived by the external senses like sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch. One cannot see God with eyes, nor can touch Him with hands, and we also know that neither can we reason beyond the senses. Swamiji explained how we can improve our faculty of intuition by yoga practices, which take the mind to a higher state and facilitates the flow of transcendental knowledge. According to him, the realization is beyond sense-perception. The Yogis say that man can go beyond his direct sense-perception beyond his reason also. Human being has the power, of transcending his intellect even, a power which is in every being, every creature. It is possible only through the practices. Through the practices, man transcends the ordinary limits of reason and directly perceives things that are beyond all reason.

Transcendentalists believe in free will, but don’t believe in determinism. Free will refers to the belief that human beings are self-determined. It means we have the ultimate power to choose how we act, and the result of our action is not in any way influenced by external conditions. On the other hand, determinism refers to the belief that all events are guided by causal laws, meaning that they are all determined by prior events external to the will. Vivekananda has cleverly utilized these two ideas in a way that makes it possible to believe in both. He has faith in both the doctrines of reincarnation and the Laws of Karma, the two pillars of determinism. Swamiji and his Master Sri Ramakrishna both have a belief that “God is present in all aspects of Nature”; from that point of view they both were Transcendentalists.

Swamiji was fully aware of the Transcendentalist Movement of America. Emerson, social reformer and leader focused on the basic tenets of American Transcendentalism, as expressed in his four seminal essays: “Self-Reliance,” “Nature,” “The Transcendentalist,” and “The Over-Soul.” Self-Reliance leads to self-sufficiency, gives freedom to discover one’s true self. This allows him to attain true independence because all knowledge begins with self-knowledge.

India's independence movement was also influenced by Vivekananda's thoughts and writing. Some activists like Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose, Aurobindo Ghose, Bal Gangadhar Tilak, and Bagha Jatin and intellectuals such as Aldous Huxley, Christopher Isherwood, and Romain Rolland are influenced by Vivekananda's writing. Transcendental meditation and other forms of Indian spiritual self-improvement in the West are the prominent things for the enthusiastic reception of yoga. According to Swami Vivekananda, all religions have different paths to the same goal.

Swami Vivekanand and Spiritualism:

In his philosophy, Vivekananda stated that the essence of Hinduism was best expressed in Adi Shankara's Advaita Vedanta philosophy. In opposition to Advaita Vedanta, Vivekananda has faith in both the things immanent and transcendent. His neo-Advaita finds the way for Dvaita or dualism and Advaita or non-dualism. Vivekananda has focused on the Vedanta by giving it a modern and Universalistic interpretation as he follows. According to Vivekananda, an individual should follow his own will instead of conforming to social norms and expectations and be guided by his intuitions, or instinct, rather than by tuitions. He knows that God's presence can best be sensed through intuition rather than through reason.

According to Swami, every soul is potentially divine. The main purpose should be to demonstrate Divinity within by controlling external and internal nature. This act can be done through work, worship, mental discipline, or philosophy. Vivekananda has given more emphasis on Nationalism in his thought. He knows that people are the base of a country's future. So he elaborated the concept of human development in his teaching. In his philosophy, Vivekananda wished, "to set in motion machinery which will bring noblest ideas to the doorstep of even the poorest and the meanest".

In his teaching, Vivekananda advised his followers to be holy, unselfish, and faithful. He manifested various powerful traits like purity, truth, unselfishness, morality with control of the mind. According to Vivekananda brahmacharya is the source of his physical and mental stamina. He explained success as the result of targeted thought and action. The idea of thought and action is important for a successful life. He explained his views on a successful life in his many lectures, he said, "Take up one idea. Make that one idea your life, think of it, dream of it, live on

that idea. Let the brain, muscles, nerves, every part of your body, be full of that idea, and just leave every other idea alone. This is the way to success that is the way great spiritual giants are produced".

Vivekananda was one of the main representatives of Neo-Vedanta. He interpreted several aspects of Hinduism with western esoteric traditions, especially Transcendentalism, New Thought, and Theosophy. He was very successful in creating a new world of understanding and appreciation of Hinduism within and outside India. Vivekananda has given new zeal to the national movement throughout India. There was a great contribution of Vivekananda to the awakening of India. He focused on poverty in the country and addressed that it was required for national awakening. His nationalistic ideas influenced Many Indian thinkers and leaders inspired by his nationalistic ideas.

Conclusion:

Swami Vivekananda was one of the great reformers and transcendentalists who awakened India spiritually and maintained the Hindu religion by breaking outdated traditions. His ideas and thoughts motivated and showed the ways to not only the people of India but people of the world. Swami Vivekananda always supported education as a Retrospective, Prospective, and Constructive agency for the growth of society. Through his lectures and writings, he framed the world view in tune with Advaita Vedanta, Science and Modern ideas of Justice, Equality, and Freedom. His contribution, in raising India with the power of the spirit and with the flag of Peace and Love was remarkable. Through his writing and actions, he developed indigenous ideas and provided a Cultural and Spiritual Identity to India.

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