SECTION - I

INTRODUCTION
CHAPTER - I

The Life, Personality and Mission of Svámi Vivékánanda

To introduce the life of Svámi Vivékánanda is to introduce the subject of spiritually in itself. As a man as a Vedántist, he manifested the manliness which was sanctity, and the sanctity which was manliness.

Narendranath Dutta or Svámi Vivékánanda, as he became known to the world later, was born in the well known Dutta family, in 1863 at Calcutta. Spirituality and renunciation ran in the family itself. Durga Charan Dutta, Narendra's grandfather renounced the world and became a monk at the young age of twenty five itself. He was a man who deemed the world well lost, in his search for God. Vishwanath Dutta, carried on the Dutta tradition of learning. His keen understanding of his fellow men was the origin of his deep compassion, wide charity and sympathy for the afflicted. His wife Bhuvaneshwari Devi, a highly religious woman, was exceptionally intelligent and commanded the respect and veneration of all who came in contact with her. It was to these two, highly devout souls that the boy Narendra, who was to become the greatest man of his age and whose influence was to shake the whole world and who was to lay the foundation of a new order of things, was born.
As a boy itself Naren had a great fancy for wandering monks. He displayed immense curiosity about the world around him and also had a great zest for life. He was one who from his young days exhibited an implicit faith in all. He got his first education at the knee of his mother and it was here that the first seed of spiritual life was sown. Young Naren, unlike other children, frequently played at meditation, although it started as a play, it awakened in him deep spiritual emotions. Due to this capacity of his deep concentration he developed a prodigious memory. Even at an early age he evinced an impatience with superstition and fear no matter how hallowed by tradition. He was no name believer nor an unquestioning victim of the imperious dicta of holy authority. He was a great believer in reason and right from his early days he sought to press the test of verification and reality on all the dogmas or dicta, which, he was told rested on infalliable authority. He hated monotony and although he was full of wild pranks as a boy, his instinct always kept him away from the dubious ways of the world. Truthfulness was the very backbone of his life.

As Naren grew older, a definite change in his temperament was noticeable. He began to show a preference for intellectual pursuits. He passed the First Arts Examination in 1881 and in the same year he met for the first time Sri Rāmakrishna Paramāhamsa. It was during this phase of life that Naren thoroughed himself in the studies of Western Logic and Philosophy. As a result of this he developed scepticism towards the authority of faith and simultaneously developed faith in pure
reason, which in later years enabled him to meet the western thinkers on their own ground.

It was during his collegiate days of life, that he underwent a wonderful psychological transformation. A born idealist and seeker of truth, he was not to be satisfied with mere worldly enjoyments. He longed to pierce the veil of nature, but his reason had to be satisfied at the same time.

Later, as Naren became involved with the issues of the day, he came under the influence of the Brahmô-Samāj, which was the outward expression of an endeavour to liberalise and at the same time to conserve the evolved instincts of the Hindu race. Naren was imbued with the same ideas. He knew the burden suffered in society and had chafed under the rigidity of caste. He had no sympathy also with polytheism and image worship. He also joined at this time, a movement for the education of masses, irrespective of caste, creed of colour.

His intense desire for freedom made him willing to identify himself with anything that promised liberation from obsolete methods, or to caste aside anything that might interfere with his gaining of a larger vision. The most important trait in his character was purity which formed the background to all his thought and feeling.

After reading Mill's, 'Three Essays on Religion', Naren lost his enthusiasm for the theism that he had Imbibed from the Brahmô-Samāj and was filled with doubts about the nature of Ultimate Reality. It was in his longing to know the truth that he turned
to Śrī Rāmakṛishṇā Paramāḥamsa at Dakshinesvar. This was the first step in his quest for God which ultimately paved the way for his transformation into Śvāmi Vivākānanda.

At their very first meeting, Śrī Rāmakṛishṇa Paramāḥamsa instantaneously recognised that Naren was the one to carry his message out into the world. Hence, he gave a great deal to reconcile religion with reason in Naren and slowly led him to the realisation of that realm of the Absolute, on realization of which he emerged as a great world teacher of the Truth of Vedanta.

On the sudden demise of his father in 1884, Naren came face to face with the crude reality of life in this world, as he was left without any resources and with the responsibility of maintaining the family. Thus, by working in an Attorney's office and also translating a few books, he managed to get some income for his family. But his profound joy lay in his frequent meetings with Śrī Rāmakṛishṇā Paramāḥamsa and it was through Śrī Rāmakṛishṇa's love and through his simple but inspired teachings that Narendra acquired the basic and highly valuable truths of Vedanta.

Naren came to Śrī Rāmakṛishṇā with all the doubts and scepticism of the modern age, unwilling to accept even the highest truths of religion without verification, yet with a burning zeal for truth raging in him. He had yet to learn that though reason is the best instrument in the relative world, yet
it cannot carry one beyond relativity into the realm of the Absolute where the truth of all religion abides.

It was in the holy hands of Śri Rāmakrishna Paramāhamsa that the personality and mind of Svāmi Vivēkānanda was fashioned into perfectiveness. Śri Rāmakrishna taught him all the truths of life as well as life eternal. Slowly and steadily Śri Rāmakrishna Paramāhamsa lifted Naren out of his framed conceptions and limitations and transformed him by taking him into that realm of the expense of Oneness, of Evershining Light and Beautitude, the experience of the Ultimate Truth, that is Brahman. Knowing, realizing and experiencing which there is nothing left to be known or experienced. This illumined Naren came to be known as Svāmi Vivēkānanda. The Svāmi Vivēkānanda who was to carry out the burning torch of truth consciousness and illumination to the world groping in the darkness of ignorance.

Brahmachārya was Svāmi Vivēkānanda’s ideal for all students. He renounced the world and took up the leadership of the mission mentally assigned to him by the Master. But, in 1886, the 16th of August, the Master, Śri Rāmakrishna Paramāhamsa passed away, leaving Svāmi Vivēkānanda to fulfil the mission assigned to him. Deeply conscious of the mission that he had to carry out, Svāmi Vivēkānanda set out without money or means, to see the land and people whom he was to serve in faith. His travels all over
India, from the Himalayas to Kanya Kumari brought him into close contact with people, their distress, problems and the degeneration prevalent in every walk of life. It was at this time that he came to know about the Parliament of Religions to be held at Chicago and he decided to go there.

Almost all world religions were being represented by their respective leaders who had come fully prepared to establish their own credentials and supremacy of their faith. But when this quite unknown young man of thirty appeared at the inaugural meeting of the Parliament of Religions, all his fellow members were forgotten in his commanding presence. His deep voice enthralled the vast audience and opened for the first time their closed minds to the glorious responsibility of the harmony of religions. This famous Chicago address enshrined the essence of his message to the world. Travelling extensively in the West made him painfully aware of the great misery in which the people of India lived.

It was this meeting with suffering and human misery, the misery of his people and the misery of India that was to act as the flint upon the steel, whence a spark would fly and set the whole soul on fire. With this as its foundation, pride, ambition, love, faith and action and all his powers and desires were directed into the mission of human service and this united into one single flame, "A religion which will give us faith in ourselves, a national self-respect, and the power to feed and educate the poor and relieve the misery around me ....... If you
want to find God, serve man!"

As a real leader of men, Vivēkānanda knew that if he was to lead the peoples to the conquest of an ideal, he had to enrol them in a spiritual militia, so that their very existence would be the pledge of the order that was to be. Hence, to consolidate his and his followers activities, in 1897, Śwāmi Vivēkānanda and his followers founded an organisation called Śri Rāmakrishna Mission. The very aim of this mission was to bring out into the world those Truths which Śri Rāmakrishna Paramāhamsa professed for the good and the upliftment of humanity as a whole. Even in New York, the Śwāmi founded the Vedāntic Society for preaching and practising the Vedānta and applying its principles to all religion. He also established two journals 'Udhdhan' in Bengali and 'Prabhudha Bharat' in English so that the message of peace, harmony and brotherhood be spread out to the masses.

Śwāmi Vivēkānanda, thus, came to create a new order of Sannyasins who would go down to hell if need be, to save others, for his theological argument was 'To think of his liberation is


unworthy of the disciple of an Avatāra”. The generous passion of his pitiful heart mastered his brethren and disciples. To quote his words, ‘The thought came to me that even if I have to undergo a thousand births to relieve the misery of the world, ay, even to remove the least pain from anyone, I shall cheerfully do it....”

At the young age of 39, did Swāmi Vivēkānanda pass away quietly on 4th July 1902 at Belur. A few hours before his samādhi, he was heard saying to himself "If there were another Vivēkānanda, he would have known what Vivēkānanda had done, and yet how many more Vivēkānandās shall be born in time”

Although Swāmi Vivēkānanda left the world for his heavenly abode yet he left behind for the world his eternal message, the message for the good of all humanity, his ideal of faith to bring out into mankind their divinity and make it manifest in every movement of life.

Swāmi Vivēkānanda was not a mere preacher of theory for if there was any one feature of the Vedānta Philosophy which he propounded, and which appeared specially refreshing, it was the possibility of practical demonstration. According to him, religion was positive, practical and a living realisation.

1. Rolland, Roman; Op.Cit P.118
2. Eastern & Western Disciples; Op.Cit. P.167
3. Ibid, p.652
Swāmi Vivēkānanda saw unity in diversity. According to him contradictions came from the same truth adapting itself to varying circumstances of different natures. And moreover, he thought, that these variations are necessary for the purposes of adaptation. But ultimately, in the heart of every thing, it is the same truth that reigns. He presented the idea of Universal Religion, having no temporal, spacial or sectarian bounds, but one including every attitude of the human mind, in a grand synthesis. The unique feature of its contents was its universal toleration and its sense and spirit of religious co-operation. For all truth is eternal and none can lay any exclusive claim to it. But the point that he always laid emphasis on was that, that truth must be made practical and simple so that it may penetrate every pore of human society. It was this synthetic outlook of spirituality in the Indian world and the soundness of Indian ideals that he wanted all to understand and realise.

Swāmi Vivēkānanda in a special sense was the first of the Indian Philosophers to prove the Hindu spiritual ideas to be truly scientific as well. The combination of the spiritual energies of the complementary disciplines, that is, religion and science, in the life of man, according to him would produce fully integrated human beings, and thus help evolve a complete human civilization which the world of to-day is awaiting.

Thus, on the basis of the Upanishads and Gītā, Swāmi Vivēkānanda expounded purity of human nature, eternity of
individual freedom and necessity of strength, intellectual and moral advancement. He was inspired by the Upanishadic call to discard all ignorance which divides us and instills in us hatred. Hence, his clarion call to mankind consisted in performing selfless service to society and strengthening individual and social life. Hence, the thought and message of the Great Swami Vivekananda lays in these words of his,

"This life is short, the vanities of the world are transient, but they alone live who live for others, the rest are more dead than alive'. Therefore 'Awake and arise and stop not' till the goal is reached".

1. Rolland, Romain; Op.Cit. P.270