

KAUSHAL GOEL'S BIOGRAPHY *SWAMI VIVEKANANDA*: AN APPRECIATION

*Ms. N. R. Shahapurkar, Plot 2195, Ramatirthanagar; Nr Ganesh Circle,  
Belgaum-590016, Karnataka*

**Abstract:**

*Swami Vivekananda is best known for his most inspiring speech which began thus: "Sisters and brothers of America ..." in which he introduced Hinduism at the Parliament of the World's Religions in Chicago in 1893. Vivekananda was a famous Hindu monk and the chief disciple of the nineteenth century saint Shri Ramakrishna Pramahansa and worshipper of goddess Kaali.*

**Key Words:** *Inspiring speech, Hinduism, spiritual teaching.*

Vivekananda was born in 1863 into an aristocratic Bengali family of Calcutta. Vishwanath Datta was an attorney of Calcutta High Court and his mother was Bhuvaneshwari Devi. During his young days he visited Raja Ramohun Roy's Brahma Samaj and later he came into contact with Shri Ramakrishna Paramhansa. He became Ramakrishna's disciple. He learnt that all living beings are part of the divine.

Kaushal Goel's biography of Vivekananda is an elaborate life sketch of Vivekananda. Narendra Datta received his education at Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar's Metropolitan Institution from 1871 to 1877. In 1879 his family came to Calcutta. He received first-division marks in the Presidency College entrance examination. Narendra was a voracious reader. He had a wide range of interest in different subjects like philosophy, religion, history, social science, art and literature. He had a deep interest in Hindu scripture like the Vedas, the Upanishads, the Bhagavad Gita, the Mahabharata, the Ramayana and the Puranas. He had learnt the Indian classical music and he regularly performed in physical exercise, sports and other fitness things. He studied further on Western logic, Western philosophy and European history at the General Assembly's Institution. He completed his B.A in 1884. He studied the works of David Hume, Auguste Comte, Immanuel Kant, Johann Gottlieb Fichte, Baruch Spinoza, George W.F. Hegel, Arthur Schopenhauer, John Stuart Mill, Lewis Carroll and Charles Darwin. Vivekananda translated Herbert Spencer's book *Education* (1861) into Bengali.

After several tests, Narendra accepted Ramakrishna as his spiritual teacher. Since 1882 Vivekananda observed and received the spiritual teachings for five years and stood with him till his death in 1886. Ramakrishna received Narendra as a Dhyana-Siddha. Narendra took many meditation lessons and became more firm. Narendra had a high desire to experience *Nirvikalpa Samadhi* and did a humble request to attain that state. Ramakrishna loved his disciple in such a way that he saw him as an embodiment of God Narayana. Ramakrishna himself clarifies the fact that "Kali the divine mother says that I love you, because I see the Lord in you." Ramakrishna compares Narendra to 'a thousand-petalled lotus, 'a jar of water', 'Halderpukur', 'a red-eyed carp' and 'a very big receptacle'.

The sudden death of Narendra's father in 1884 made his family bankrupt. Relatives threatened the family to go away from them. Creditors were troubling them for repayment of loans. Once upon a time Narendra was a son of a well-to-do family but then he became the poorest in his college days. Ultimately, he found the solace in his teacher Ramakrishna at Dakshineswar. Ramakrishna had throat cancer in 1885 and shifted to a garden house in Cossipore. Narendra and other disciples took care of his master during his last days.

During this time Narendra experienced *Nirvikalpa Samadhi*. He was taught that servicing the

mankind is equal to worshipping God. The last two days before the death of Ramakrishna, Narendra was serious about the question whether he is really the incarnation of the God? Suddenly his master replied that he who in the past was born as Rama and Krishna, is living in this very body as Ramakrishna-but not from the standpoint of our Vedanta. He soon died in the early morning on 16 August 1886 in Cossipore and cremated on the bank of Ganges.

Baranagar Math was the first monastery established by Vivekananda. It has been considered the most important in his life time. On 25<sup>th</sup> January, 1973 under the guidance of the Swami Ramanada the local people of Baranagar formed a society named 'Baranagar Math Samrakshan Samiti.' In October 2001, Baranagar Math Samarakshan Samity handed over the land to the authority of Ramakrishna Mission. Here they started some social activities in the form of a charity like a free coaching center for poor students or slum children, a dispensary of homoeopathic, an open general library and they started conducting lectures and religious discourses regularly for the spiritual awakening of society. Narendra took a long span journey throughout India from 1888 to 1893. He met Pavahar Baba and studied Advaita Vedanta from him.

Ajit Singh was a close friend and strong follower of Vivekananda and the two met thrice in 1891, 1893 and 1897. The credit of speaking at the Parliament of World's Religions at Chicago and financial support to Vivekananda goes to Ajit Singh. The rich man sent a monthly stipend of 100 rupees to Vivekananda's family at Kolkata.

Due to the strong encouragement of his friend Ajit Singh Vivekananda made up his mind to visit Chicago and represented India and Hinduism at the Parliament of World's Religions which was held from 11 to 27 September 1893.

Welcome Address Chicago, Sept 11, 1893: Sisters and Brothers of America,

It fills my heart with joy unspeakable to rise in response to the warm and cordial welcome which you have given us. I thank you in the name of the most ancient order of monks in the world; thank you in the name of the mother of religious, and I thank you in the name of millions and millions of Hindu people of all classes and sects.

My thanks, also, to some of the speakers on this platform who, referring to the delegates from the Orient, have told you that these men from far-off nations may well claim the honor of bearing to different lands the ideas of toleration. I am proud to belong to a religion which has taught the world both tolerance and universal acceptance. We believe not only in universal toleration, but we accept all religions as true. I am proud to belong to a nation which has sheltered the persecuted and the refugees of all religions and all nations of the earth. I am proud to tell you that we have gathered in our bosom the purest remnant of the Israelites, who came to Southern India and took refuge with us in the very year in which their holy temple was shattered to pieces by Roman tyranny. I am proud to belong to the religion which has sheltered and is still fostering the remnant of the grand Zoroastrian nation. I will quote to you, brethren, a few lines from hymn which I remember to have repeated from my earliest boyhood, which is every day repeated by millions of human beings: "As the different streams having their sources in different paths which men take through different tendencies, various though they appear, crooked or straight, all lead to Thee."

After his journey to America Vivekananda arrived to his motherland and stayed for two years from 1897 to 1899. Vivekananda received a warm welcome from the Raja of Ramnad, his pupil, who motivated him to go to America and helped him financially. At Rameshwaram his friend this Raja created, a victory column of forty feet high with a suitable inscription on his master's honor. In 'My plan of Campaign', the famous lecture delivered in Madras, Vivekananda called upon the people to assert their soul-force. He told the Indians to stop complaining and to utilize the power which lay in their hands.

Vivekananda was enjoying the ship journey from Madras to Calcutta. A reception committee was preparing to welcome him. The steamer docked at Budge. Vivekananda and his party arrived by the train in

1897. The reception was excellent and filled with enthusiastic crowd at the railway station in Calcutta. A huge procession took place along with music and religious songs. The anniversary of Sri Ramakrishna's birth was celebrated at Dakshineswar. On 1 May 1897 in Calcutta, Vivekananda established Ramakrishna Mission for the social service of people. It dealt with the ideal concept of 'Karma Yoga'. It had the governing body of the trustees of the Ramakrishna Math. Both Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission made Belurmath their headquarters. Simultaneously, Vivekananda had a deep respect and love towards his teacher, Sri Ramakrishna. His constant directions, preaching and motivations had driven him to reach the goal of his life. These two are the best examples for the teacher and disciple relationship. Vivekananda inspired Jamshetaji Tata for establishing a research and educational institution when both were travelling together from Yokohama to Chicago on Vivekananda's first visit to the West in 1893.

Vivekananda became an extremely popular figure after delivering the lectures at several places of America and England. He returned to India from his journey, and established the famous 'Ramakrishna Maths and Mission in 1897. On March 19, 1899 he established Advaita Ashrama in Mayavati near Almora. This ashram is considered to be the branch of Ramakrishna Math. In 1898 he composed a melodious prayer song 'Khanadana Bhava-Bandhana' dedicated to his master Ramakrishna.

Vivekananda's second visit to the West and his final years fall from 1899 to 1902. Vivekananda left for the West in June 1899. This time his health was upset and he was accompanied by Sister Nivedita and Swami Turiyananda. He stayed in England for a short duration and left for America. This time he founded the Vedanta Societies in San Francisco and Shanti Ashram in California. In 1900 he went to Paris for the Congress of Religions. In Paris he lectured on the worship of Lingam and the authenticity of Bhagavad Gita. Later, he visited Brittany, Egypt, Athens, Vienna and Istanbul. Jules Bois, the French philosopher was his host throughout this period till he returned to Calcutta on 9<sup>th</sup> December, 1900. Later he gave a brief visit to the Advaita Ashrama in Mayavati. Vivekananda went to Belurmath, where he continued for the works for Ramakrishna Mission.

Vivekananda visited Los Angeles, California in 1899. He became a celebrity due to his special oratorical skills and also the presentation of Hindu religious factors and its comparison made a broad spectrum in American audience. Between 1893-1897 and 1899-1902 he took a long journey in America by lecturing on a wide range of topics and establishing Vedanta centers.

On 4<sup>th</sup> July 1902 Vivekananda attained Mahasamadhi. That day he awoke early in the morning and went to chapel at Belur Math and meditated for three hours. He spoke so many things like 'Shukla-Yajur-Veda', Sanskrit grammar and the philosophy of Yoga. Vivekananda believed that the essence of Hinduism was best expressed in Vedanta philosophy, based on Adi Shankar's interpretation. He summarized the Vedanta as follows:

Each soul is potentially divine. The goal is to manifest this Divinity within by controlling nature, external and internal. Do this either by work, or worship, or mental discipline, or philosophy-by one or more, or all of these-and be free. This is the whole of religion. Doctrines, or dogmas, or rituals, or books, or temples, or forms, are but secondary details.” (Goyal,111).

Vivekananda emphasized that success was an outcome of focused thought and action. In the words of Roman Rolland, “Vivekananda's speech was like a tongue of flame. It fired the souls of the listening throng.” (Rolland 37).

#### References:

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