

CHAPTER - III

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MOULDING OF FUTURE VIVEKANANDA THROUGH WANDERINGS

Introduction

It was on August 16, 1886, that Sri Ramakrishna passed away leaving his disciples in deep gloom. After the death of the master, Vivekananda began to organize these disciples into a monastic brotherhood. He went to the homes of those boys who had resumed their studies, and by a whirlwind of enthusiasm, tried to induce them to return to Baranagar where the first monastery of the Ramakrishna order was started. One by one the young disciples joined together and ultimately bounded themselves into a holy brotherhood under the inspiring leadership of Vivekananda. Vivekananda always spurred them on to burning renunciation and intense devotion. With the delight of a martyr these Monks practised the severest of spiritual austerities, and the world had no meaning for them at that time.

That he had a mission in life Vivekananda was conscious of, or at least was made conscious of, by Sri Ramakrishna. But he could not be sure for a long time, after the demise of Sri Ramakrishna what that

mission actually was. He wrote to Babu Pramadas Mitra of Benaras in July, 1889: "By the will of God, the last six or seven years of my life have been full of constant struggles..... I have been vouchsafed the ideal *Shastra*; I have seen the ideal man; and yet fail myself to get on with anything to the end- this is my profound misery."

The mission appeared in a very dim way to be the good of his own people or, rather, 'the good of mankind'. But he hovered between service to the country and the world and what Rolland called his 'passion for the divine gulf'. Vivekananda remained in such a tension for a considerable time-that was, the tension between *Dharma* and *Moksha*. Finally, however, 'the passion for the divine gulf' appeared to be too state to him, for he clearly perceived that 'it is more blessed to give than to receive' or, in the words of Sister Nivedita, 'to protect another is infinitely greater than to attain salvation'. He further realized that it was the essence of Sri Ramakrishna's philosophy of life. A perfected soul as he was, Sri Ramakrishna was only after giving and never after receiving.

After he had understood Ramakrishna thus, Vivekananda concluded that eschatological *Moksha* was not for him. He then definitely cast his decision in favour of *Dharma* - selfless service to the people to which he was committed by his *sannyasa*. Vivekananda chose, in the words of Rolland, 'the service of God in man'. Since the term 'man'

had special reference to his own people, this hour signalled the birth of Vivekananda, the patriot. But since he had not yet consciously dedicated himself to the wretched masses of his country, even though he had chosen 'the service of God in man', the tension seems to have persisted. It was over only after the dedication had been made. Then he fully realized that service as *Dharma* is a means to *moksha-moksha* is realizable through *karma* too.

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Soon a tendency to embrace a wandering life, according to the traditions of Monks, was most irresistibly felt by most of these young Monks. Vivekananda, in spite of his anxiety to maintain the ties of uniting the brotherhood, was himself tormented with the same desire to strike out in to the unknown paths of the monk's life and to lose himself in the silence of the wild, under the wide Canopy of heavens. Vivekananda resisted the call to flight for two years and apart from his short visits to some neighbouring places, he practically remained at Baranagar until 1888. But he was determined to break away from the Monastery to test his own strength, together experiences of a new life, to make himself absolutely fearless, and at the same time to force his brother - disciples to learn self-reliance and to stand-alone. He therefore suddenly Left Calcutta in 1888 and went to Vanarasi,

Ayodhya, Lucknow, Agra, Vrindaban, Hathras, and the Himalayas. At the railway station of Hathras he quite unintentionally made Sharad Chandra Gupta, the Stationmaster, and his disciple, who afterwards took the name of Sadananda. Sharat Chandra, without a moment's hesitation, left his hearth and home and followed the Swami gladly in his itinerancy through the hills. For some time both were lost in the silence of the Himalayas and were almost dead to outside world. But physical hardship and severe spiritual austerities undermined their health; both had to come back to the Baranagar Monastery after gathering manifold experiences.

After a year the Swamiji again went out and visited, among other places, Ghazipur. During his stay at Ghazipur, he met the illustrious saint Pavhari Baba who had attained to great spiritual heights through hard austerities and yogic practices. Despite the useful lessons, which he was able together from his travels, his heart still panted for a life of absolute freedom from all external frammels. He wanted to plunge into the depths of the Himalayas to acquire through extreme forms of mental discipline a tremendous spiritual power which would enable him to carry on his Master's mission without hindrance. With this end in view he broke loose at the beginning of July 1890, this time for many years, from the Baranagar Monastery. Swami Akhandananda, one of his brother disciples, who had just returned from his Tibetan travels with a fund of wonderful experiences of the life and manners of the people of the Himalayas,

became his companion at Varanasi Swamiji wrote to his friend, Pramadadas Mitra, a great Sanskrit scholar, 'I am going away; but I shall never come back until I can burst on society like a bomb and make it follow me like a dog.' From the moment he left Calcutta he was happy. The solitude, the village air, the sight of new places, the meeting with new people and getting rid of old impressions and worry delighted him. When they reached the Himalayas, the splendid scenery with its waterfalls, streams wild forests and its serenity and quietude and above all, its invigorating atmosphere buoyed up the spirit of the Swamiji, and the occasional glimpses of the eternal snows filled his heart with unspeakable emotion and joy. They wanted to go to Kedarnath and Badrikashrama, but they had to give up their idea of visiting those ancient places of pilgrimage as the road was closed by the government on account of famine.

By February 1891, the Swamiji finally became a solitary Monk and began his historic wandering of two years through India. He wandered, free from any plan, constantly with the thought of God in his mind. The Swami, in the course of his pilgrimage around India, met with all sorts and conditions of men and found himself today a despised beggar sheltered by pariahs or a brother of the oppressed identifying himself in keen sympathy with their misery and tomorrow a guest of the princes, conversing on equal terms with prime ministers and Maharajas and probing the luxury of the great and awakening care for the public weal in their torpid hearts.

First he visited Rajputana, the land of heroes, where he met some of the most enlightened Princes of the day. While at Alwar the Swamiji had a very interesting discussion with Prince Mangal Singh. The Maharaja asked the Swamiji, 'well, I have no faith in idol worship. I cannot worship wood, earth, stone or metal like other people. Does this mean that I shall fare worse in the life hereafter? The eyes of the Swamiji alighted on a picture of the Maharaja which was hanging on the wall. At his express desire it was passed to him. Holding it in his hand, the Swamiji asked, 'whose picture in this?' The *Dewan* answered, 'it is the likeness of our Maharaja.' A moment later those present trembled with fear when they heard the Swamiji commanding the *Dewan* to spit on it. The *Dewan* was thunder-struck and the eyes of all glanced in terror and awe from the prince to the Monk, from the Monk to the prince. But all the while the Swamiji insisted, 'Spit on it! I say, spit on it!' And the *Dewan* in fear and bewilderment cried out, 'what! Swamiji! What are you asking me to do? This is the likeness of our Maharaja. How can I do such a thing?' 'Be it so', said the Swamiji, 'But the Maharaja is not bodily present in this photograph. This is only a piece of paper. It does not contain his bones and flesh and blood. It does not speak or behave or move in any way as does the Maharaja. And yet all of you refuse to spit on it, because you see in this photo the shadow of the Maharaja's form. Indeed, in spitting upon the photo, you feel that you insult your master, the prince himself.' Turning to the Maharaja, he continued: 'see, your Highnesses, though this is not you in one sense, in another

sense it is you. That was why your devoted servants were so perplexed when I asked them to spit upon it. It has a shadow of you; it brings you into their minds. One glance as it makes them see you in it! Therefore they look upon it with as much respect as they do upon your own person. Thus it is with the devotees who worship stone and metal images of Gods and Goddesses. It is because an image brings to their minds their Ista or some special form and attribute of the Divinity, and helps them to concentrate that the devotees worship God in an image. They do not worship the stone or the metal as such. Everyone, O, Maharaja is worshipping the same one God who is the Supreme Spirit, the soul of pure knowledge. And God appears to all according to their understanding and their representation of Him'. The Maharaja who had been listening attentively all this time said with folded hands: 'Swamiji! I must admit that according to the light you have thrown upon image worship, I have never yet met anyone who had worshipped stone or wood or metal. therefore I did not understand its meaning. You have opened my eyes.'

This is but one of the numerous instances to show what illuminating discourse the Swamiji had, in the course of his tour, with men of learning and influence and how, with his characteristic frankness and boldness, he told all whatever he felt to be true and proper in the inmost core of his heart. But occasions were not wanting when the Swamiji learnt lessons of the highest wisdom even from the lowliest and the lost. One instance would suffice. Just before the Swamiji's

departure for the West, the Maharaja of Khetri, who had already become his initiated disciple, accompanied the Swamiji as far as Jaipur. On this occasion the Maharaja was being entertained one evening with music by a *nautch* - girl. The Swamiji was in his own tent when the music commenced. The Maharaja sent a Message to the Swamiji asking him to come and joins the party. The Swamiji sent word in return that as a *Sannyasin* he could not comply with such a request. The singer was deeply grieved when she heard this, and sang in reply, as it were, a song of the great *Vaishnava* saint, *Sudras'*. Through the still evening air, to the accompaniment of music, the girl's melodious voice ascended to the ears of the Swamiji.

The Swamiji was completely overwhelmed. The woman and her meaningful song at once reminded him that the same Divinity dwells in the high and the low, the rich and the poor - in the entire creation. The Swamiji could no longer resist the request, and took his seat in the hall of audience to meet the wishes of the Maharaja. Speaking of this incident later, the Swamiji said, 'That incident removed the scales from my eyes. Seeing that all our indeed the manifestations of the one, I could no longer condemn anybody.'

The Swamiji's itinerancy led him through almost all the historic places of Rajputana, Bombay state, and southern India till at last he reached Kanyakumari in all probability on 23rd December 1892. No

doubt, every moment of these travels of his with an open mind for several years throughout the length and breadth of India - from the dreamy poetic regions of the snow - capped Himalayas down to Kanyakumari, the last promontory of the land where the mighty ocean spreads out into infinity - were eventful. All these wandering had a great educational value for him , opening up, as it did, opportunities for original thought and observation, the most striking element in all of which was his tireless search for unity in the world of Indian ideals. Nevertheless, it was at Kanyakumari that his pilgrimage throughout his motherland and his days and months of thought on the problem of the Indian masses bore fruit.

Happy as a child is to be back with its mother, so was the Swamiji when he prostrated before the image of the Divine Mother in the seashore temple at Kanyakumari. After worshipping the mother, he swam across some two furlongs of the shark-infested ocean and reached the further of the two rocks that form the southern most extremity of India. Over the three days he sat there, he was in a long and deep meditation. The Swamiji himself has told of the thoughts that moved through his mind during that period. He saw as it were the whole of India - her past, present and future her centuries of greatness and also her centuries of degradation. He saw that it was not religion that was the cause of India's downfall but on the contrary, the fact that her individuality, was scarcely to be found and he knew that her only hope was a renaissance of the lost spiritual

culture of the ancient *Rishis*. But first of all the removal of peoples, poverty, illiteracy and selfishness are necessary, otherwise the people would not understand the real meaning of India's spiritual culture. But so long people suffered from poverty the restoration of spiritual culture was not possible. He was so moved by the ill-fed life of the people that his heart bled for them. In a letter to Swami Brahamananda he said, "I have travelled all over India. But also, it was agony to me, my brothers, to see with my own eyes the terrible poverty and misery of the masses, and I could not restrain my tears! It is now my firm conviction that it is futile to preach religion amongst them without first trying to remove their poverty and their suffering. It is for this reason-to find more means for the salvation of the poor of India-that I am now going to America".

[II]

SWAMI VIVEKANANDA'S GREAT REALISATIONS THROUGH JOURNEYS

Swami Vivekananda continued his journeys -

During journeys he had a two fold realizations: Spiritual and Secular. During wanderings Swami Vivekananda discovered among other things the tragic face of suffering humanity in his own country. Swami Vivekananda further found that this suffering humanity was satisfied just by trying to keep itself "ready for life beyond this world". But he could not think this to be enough, for he thought at that time that it was a negation of justice. He therefore resolved that "they must have a better piece of bread and better piece of rug on their bodies." Thus Vivekananda, the prophet of social justice and therefore of harmonious growth was planning his march.

The second thing which he had perceived during these pilgrimages was eternal India, which perception, according to Rolland, was instrumental in his realization of the 'Spiritual Unity of India and Asia'.

Next it grows and transcends the territorial limit. We have from Rolland; again that Vivekananda informed his brother-disciples that the ancient idea of monopoly divine right had been substituted in the west by 'a perception of the Divinity of nature and of unity'. Human spirit can perceive unity only when it is liberated; and the liberated spirit, perceiving unity, extends itself towards fraternity, called by the prosaic name of 'co-operation' in our days. Thus from his idea of unity Vivekananda came to conceive of 'co-operation' as a universal principle.

During later short journeys, before 'he was swallowed up by the immensity of India'; we find that Vivekananda was struggling for the synthesis of faith and reason, of the implications of the Vedanta and social realization of the west. This was but another stride towards unity and its corollary, universal co-operation. This march towards synthesis later on found expression in such assertions as "Vedanta and modern posit a self-evolving cause".

Unity on the basis of synthesis requires accommodation of all faiths of all lower ideas of religion. During his pilgrimage excursions one of Vivekananda's problems was how to achieve this. Later though he was inclined to write a maximum Testamentum, it is this urge for synthesis and accommodation that ultimately enabled him to develop his gospel on the basis of sublimation and absorption.

This more he gathered from experience, the more his spirit expanded and his gospel developed. After he had chosen 'to serve God in man', Vivekananda began to feel the growth of a prodigious force in himself. It manifested itself in his resolve to change the face of society, or what Sister Nivedita describes as 'Nation-making'. For this he felt that he required 'freedom'- freedom from all chains that bound him. He therefore, decided on a solitary pilgrimage covering the whole of India, with only a staff and bowl and without a name. Consequently, he broke away from all, and 'the dust of the vast of the subcontinent completely engulfed him'.

During four years of his itinerant life, which included the brief former excursions, he strode the length and breadth of the country. "Plumbing the life of the people to its depths." Before this he thoroughly knew the middle class and the intelligentsia, at least of Bengal. Now he came to know the princes and the *Pandits*, but more intimately the masses --- the rank and file of exploited and downtrodden class.

With this acquaintance, the spiritual unity of the Indian people which he had intuitively perceived earlier became a matter of realization on the empirical plane. He felt that he was with each one of them 'On a footing of equality'. But he found that most of them remained in practice separated from him and from one another owing to wide

difference in material condition and in outlook. In other words, objects poverty of the masses and the outlandish view of life of the upper classes stood in the way of forging unity in actual social life. Yet common bases were there. The innate spirituality or what Max Muller calls 'transcendental temperament' of the people and unbroken chain of countless gods 'that formed only one God' being the most important of them. Their love of God and their acceptance of others, gods were the index of their true religious nature. This also implied perception of the principle of unity which is the essence of true religious culture. Any scheme for the growth of Indian social life must therefore be founded on this base, he concluded.

From this realization there emanated two of the cardinal precepts of his philosophy, to blossom forth later in the light of further experience: - **1. Each people like each individual have a theme of life and 2. Growth in the case of each - whether individual or society - must come from within.**

However, consolidation of the religious base would not solve the problem of poverty nor was the consolidation possible in any way so long as millions remained at the door step of death. Hence, poverty was to be attacked simultaneously. Only with 'a better piece of bread and a better piece of rug on their shoulders' the masses could become truly religious and thus perceive unity. Eradication of poverty was,

therefore, the first essential condition for the forward movement. Vivekananda was sure that this could be done through self-help and mutual aid. In terms of his gospel, it implied liberation of the spirit in man and its extension to fraternity.

Another important element that Swami Vivekananda acquired for his faith during his wanderings in India was the duty of resisting the evil. It so happened that one day in Benares, hotly pursued by a troop of monkeys, the Swami was running away when a *Sannyasin* shouted to him: "Face the brutes," He stopped, turned round and the monkeys gave up the chase and quickly disappeared. Later on as a preacher Swami Vivekananda used this experience to exhort the people "to face the dangers and vicissitudes of life and run not away from them." It may be safely held that the precious experience went to the making of his cult of optimism and his concept of duty.

Now Vivekananda comes to the last lap of his itinerary. Bearing the burden of finding the right way for India's salvation and pondering over different alternatives he moved towards Cape Comorin, the land's end of India, where the three seas meet. There he passed into a deep meditation upon the present and future condition of his country. This realization paved the way for building up a new nation, a new India, through the service to man regarding him the God-incarnate. He realized that without socio-spiritual upliftment the

nation could not breadth a new life and a religion that spoke of individual's liberation only could inspire no social life. A religion to be social must base itself on the principle of social service. But what is a society? It is the image of God. Hence regard society as God and serve God in the life of society. This is the new truth which he learnt from his Master Ramakrishna Paramhansa. Ramakrishna said, "*Siva Jnane Jiva Seva*". Swami Vivekananda realized that "*Mantra*" could help nation and humanity to breadth the spirit of a new life, a life eternal. This new "*Mantra*" is the foundation upon which Vivekananda later built up his philosophy of "*Practical Vedanta*". To Vivekananda the resurgence of India would be possible if Vedanta is brought in to practice in day to day life. The life of humanity would be changed if the spirit of Vedanta is cultivated in the life of society. Thus wanderings helped Vivekananda to realize truths necessary for helping humanity.