

## THE QUEST FOR SELF-DISCOVERY: THE PRESENT AND THE SELF RICOCHETING BETWEEN PAST AND FUTURE

SNEHA BURDE  
ABHIRAM DAPKE  
YCCE, NAGPUR, INDIA.

### Abstract

*One of the meanings of life is to get to know oneself. How can we ever know anyone else but ourselves? We are all in the same boat, there is no real distinction between us. We all might imagine there is something wrong with us some time or another in our lifetimes – the only barrier is this realization of self and other. Sylvia allured loneliness she considered to be alone is an opportunity. When in crowd we never learn, we never become anything new. She believed there is no fountain so nurturing as our own well of self; our inner world, our personal suffering and heart-broken moments are the things we will look back on and celebrate. While in meditation a person reaches the greatest state of all. How a person desperately wants to be out of misery though somewhere he knows that he gets to learn more when in facing problems than during happiness or success. When he is happy he wants time to be still...the moment to stay longer and forever he be in that state ... Swamiji says misery and happiness are temporary in life... nothing will last forever!! You will never understand someone's pain until you are the one feeling it. There is a thing called poverty, striving hunger, dying people out of life's basic needs which no-one is concerned about but here both Sylvia and Vivekananda faced, knew well and understood the living pain in the hearts of the people. Vivekananda even carried out the worldwide popular 'Ramakrishna mission' whose activities include areas such as education, health-care, rural uplift, tribal welfare, youth movement. Both the personalities are eminent in their work and thoughts. This paper intends to study their ideas and beliefs and an attempt to throw a light on their self-identity.*

**Keywords:** - Freedom, nothingness, sorrow and happiness, convalesce,

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The unabridged journals of Sylvia Plath' by Sylvia Plath and ' A colossus named Vivekananda ' by Romain Rolland and their human effort higher than the life of the individual, at times higher than the life of existing society and even higher than the life of humanity as a whole and their convalesce.

### FREEDOM

Sylvia Plath (October 27 , 1932 – February 11 ,1963) was an American poet, novelist and short story writer . she was an extra ordinary woman with a high degree of confidence she'd in writing about herself especially in her ' the unabridged journals of Sylvia Plath' she writes about almost everything ( the secrets, hidden thoughts and reveals her innermost feelings deeply) . Born in Boston , Massachusetts she studied at Smith College and Newnham at the university of Cambridge, before receiving acclaim as a poet and writer.

Whatever restrictions are placed on a society, a person can never be made deprived of the freedom to think and feel, they are impossible to take away. Besides the fact that the idea of restricted freedom is prominent in the society , the author can't help but feel and think things that are forbidden to be discussed out loud in the society he resides in . She writes about the imprisonment of the individual in the cell of her own limitations. She says

'Your room is not your prison. You are. And smith cannot cure you; no one has the power to cure you but yourself. Be an introvert for 3 months – stop thinking of noise, names, dances Higher Education & Research Society. The price of all this is high. Neurotic woman. Fie. Get a job. Learn shorthand at night. NOTHING EVER REMAINS THE SAME'

She is way too different from other girls who didn't had such high ideals as she had at that time of the eighteenth century. She is a woman of a strong character who thinks a person should bear freedom of oneself, to think , to learn, to do everything he/she wants to , to act according to his wishes and not by the rules laid by the society.

On the other hand swami Vivekananda's idea of freedom is as follows-

Swami Vivekananda (12 Jan 1863 - 4 July 1902) born narendranath dutta was an Indian Hindu monk and chief disciple of the 19<sup>th</sup> century saint shri Ramakrishna. He was a key figure in the introduction of Indian philosophies of Vedanta and yoga to the western world.

The author Romain Rolland is a Nobel laureate who got the Nobel Prize for his famous novel 'Jean Christophe'. A musician and a pacifist, he was much attracted by Vivekananda's ideas of a world religion and decided to learn more and write about them. He wrote a book 'A colossus named Vivekananda' in which he quotes the ideas of swami Vivekananda. He writes:

'He told his brethren how in the west the ancient ideal of divine right, which had formerly been appanage of one single being, had gradually been recognized as the property of all without distinction of class, and that the human spirit has thus come to a perception of the divinity of nature and of unity. He saw and immediately proclaimed the necessity of introducing into India the same ideas which had been tried by America and Europe with such happy results. Thus from the first he exhibited that freedom and greatness of spirit, that seeks and desires the common good, and spiritual progress of all men by the united efforts of all men.'

Swami Vivekananda exhibited such freedom and benevolence towards others that he wanted to revolutionize India and make it a strong nation by sacrificing a thousand men (sacrifice here refers to self-abnegation and hard work). Seeing the well ordered, civilized western society, swamiji's patriotic heart longed for the same thing in India.

### **NOTHINGNESS**

Anytime you have a question, just look outside and all the answers to your questions are in nature. When you look into a pond and it is perfectly still, you will see a reflection of yourself. And as the pond is disturbed, your reflection will disappear. In higher-level meditations, your mind becomes perfectly still, you see the light, which is a reflection of yourself. The light, you see, is your true self. You are a light body and that you see when you still the mind. This is a part of self-discovery, discovering who you are. You are the light. You are a light body and that is connected to everything. This is all a process of self-discovery and it is the discovery of who you are. Once you discover who you are, you will discover where you are going and how you are going to get there. And this is the journey into nothingness. Sylvia says

'I am afraid; I am not solid, but hollow. I feel behind my eyes a numb, paralyzed cavern, a pit of hell, a mimicking nothingness. I never thought, I never wrote, I never suffered.'

There are no notions of superiority, pride, envy, or anything else in her heart and mind. Every remaining bit of pride, ego, self-importance, and envy had been shot out of her system. It is this very state where all these pollutants get removed.

The thought plunged her into silence and deeper thoughts --- as if she were descending step by step into herself, searching the dark void for some light, some guidance.

The most difficult dilemma for a person is perhaps when his heart testifies to an inevitable reality yet his tongue will not proclaim it, when his mind screams in acceptance of the truth but he cannot bring himself to state it.

While Vivekananda thought of nothingness in a different way:

Swamiji is saying these words, appeared in the eyes of the disciple like the very embodiment of 'fearlessness' and he thought,

'How in his(god) presence even the fear of death leaves one and vanishes into nothingness.'

Swamiji continues, in this embodied existence, you will be tossed again and again on the waves of happiness and misery, prosperity and adversity but know them all to be momentary duration. Never care for them.

'I am birth less, the deathless Atman, whose nature is intelligence.'

Romain Rolland quotes:

'His contact was terrible. With my eyes open I saw the walls and everything in the room whirling and vanishing into nothingness....the whole universe and my own individuality were at the same time almost lost into the nameless void, which swallowed up everything that is.'

### **SORROW and HAPPINESS**

'I have experienced love, sorrow, madness and if I cannot make these experiences meaningful, no new experience will help me.'

'When one is so full and rich and has so many inner worlds than the outer world is not necessary for joy, because joy emanates from the inner core of ones being.'

'I believe oneself imperfect and others perfect - this is true happiness'.

In life, at some time or another we come to a point where all relationships cease- where there is only us and god. There are no parents, brother or sister, or any friend. Then we

realize there is no earth under us nor is there sky above, but only god who is supporting us in this emptiness. Then at this state we realize our worth – it is not more than a grain of sand or the leaf of a plant. Then we realize our existence is only confined to our being. This is where we truly understand ourselves. Our demise makes not a whit of difference to the world around us, nor to the scheme of things. We come to our senses; we understand our utter significance.

She felt as though someone was slowly squeezing the life out of her. She wanted to share her woes with them. But, she felt as though nobody was really interested in her. Everybody had details of their own activities. She realized that people were primarily interested in their lives. She could not even talk to her mother, she never felt like, maybe there was not a bond that strong or she didn't want her to know. She lost interest in studies, everything appeared artificial to her. She had gone into deep depression. Everything became meaningless for her. The lack of meaning and purpose in everything was becoming increasingly apparent. She was suspended in a vacuum, in limbo, somewhere in between being alive yet dead and dead yet alive... she was reaching the limits of hedonism moment by moment.

She had been on a soul-searching journey. She had entered a phase of silence: not to speak but only to listen. And listening was, at times, more important it dawned on her.

Sometimes in our lives we do not know whether we have emerged from darkness into light or if we are entering into the dark --- the direction is unknown. But one can differentiate, in any case between the earth and the sky. When you raise your head, it is the sky above; and when you lower it, it is the earth below --- whether or not it is visible. To move forward in life, you need just four points of direction--- right and left, ahead and behind---the fifth is the ground under your feet. If that were not there, it would be an abyss, hell, and on arriving there one would have no direction. The sixth point of direction is inside and that is unattainable. That is where soul is... which is present in every heartbeat, every pulsing flow of the blood, every breath, every morsel that went down one's throat.

On the other hand swami Vivekananda's idea of sorrow and happiness concerns with peoples suffering and helplessness and joy. He says-

'I almost died of hunger. Barefoot I wandered from office to office, repulsed on all sides. I gained experience of human sympathy. This was my first contact with the realities of life. I discovered it had no room for the poor, the weak, the deserted. Those who several days before would be proud to help me, turned away their faces although they possessed the means to do so.'

Adversity hit Vivekananda like an arrow pierced suddenly through this heart. He became despondent. He says,

'but now that I am faced with the cruelty of life, it rings in my ears like deadly mockery.'

Naren tasted misery, knew the vain search for employment and the denial of friends. He could not understand the cause of his affliction. Then suddenly he realized that it was his rending sympathy which made him often shed tears of burning blood. And the world would never have known it. He pledged,

'I am going away; but I shall come back until I burst on society like a bomb, and make it follow me like a dog.' And when he came back, the society was obliged to bow down at his feet.

The author writes,

'Every night, just as I felt asleep, two dreams took shape. In one I saw myself among the great ones on earth, the possessor of riches, honours, power and glory, and I felt the capacity to attain all these was in me. But at the next instant, I found myself renouncing all worldly things, dressed in a simple loin cloth, living on alms, sleeping at the foot of the tree; and I thought I was capable also of living thus, like the rishis of old. Of these two pictures, the second took the upper hand and I felt that only thus could a man attain supreme bliss.'

Swami Vivekananda believes that through self-denial, spirituality, abstaining from all the worldly desires and absolute chastity only can one achieve supreme bliss i.e. the happiness which would last forever. All the materialistic things in our life are temporary but to achieve permanent bliss, we need to practice chastity and relinquish our desires.

### **CONVALESCENCE**

'A philosophical attitude: a drinking and living of life to the less: please don't let me stop thinking and start blindly frighteningly accepting! I want to taste and glory in each day, and never be afraid to experience pain; and never shut myself up in a numb core of non-feeling, and stop questioning and criticizing life and take the easy way out. To learn and think; to think and live; to live and learn; this always with new insight, new understanding and new love.'

She had a lot of worries. She did not had peace of mind. She used to keep all that she had with herself which corroded her like a poison. In all those years she had travelled a long way --- a journey of the mind and soul. She was not able to find out. She is still trying to

know herself. She was finding in herself strength to bear the tribulations in her life. She never wanted to be a burden on anyone. She idealized independency because she knew being dependent on someone is a painful reality. She was learning how to live life on her own. This woman had in her palm a tiny firefly of guidance, and in the burst of its light, she had made her way through every dark alley of life without ever stumbling. And this is how she was trying to discover herself!

While with Vivekananda it happened so as:

Extreme adversity turned swami Vivekananda berserk and he started heaping maledictions upon god.

'If god is good and gracious, then why do millions of people die every day for want of a few morsels of food?'

He pondered. He had never been able to conceal his thoughts and now he spoke openly against god.

All judged him lost except Ramakrishna in his retreat at dakshineswar. He had unswerving faith in him. Even naren's mother and brothers were not capable of it. Ramakrishna's unshakable confidence joined naren to him forever.

One evening when naren had eaten nothing, he sat down exhausted by the side of the road in front of a house. A delirium of fever raged in his prostrate. Suddenly, it seemed as if the folds enveloping his soul were rent asunder, and there was light. He could truly say, 'I see, I know, I believe, I understand.' He spent that night in meditation. In the morning, he had decided to renounce the world and fixed a day when this definite vow was to be accomplished.

Later, he became a pure sanyasi to conquer the whole world. His going abroad was the first sign that India was awake not only to survive but to conquer. He started a mission called "Ramakrishna mission" for helping the poor. He is best known for his speech in which he introduced Hinduism at the 'Parliament of the world's Religions' in Chicago in 1893.

This was the conquest of self discovery of the behemoth named Vivekananda.

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