

## A GREAT SON OF INDIA

### A. Lead-in :

Many great saints were born in India. One among these carried the teachings of the Upanisads to the people of the world. The great and liberal philosophy of India fascinated the audience when the young saint spoke to them in simple words but with profound faith and confidence. Can you guess the name of the young saint ? Dr. Sarvapalli Radhakrishnan, the great teacher and philosopher speaks about him on the saint's 92<sup>nd</sup> birth day. Read the lesson to know more about the great son of India.

### B. The Text :

I am happy to be here and distribute prizes for recitation and speech competitions. I congratulate those who have won these rewards on their achievements. The students who won the prizes and the many others who competed for them had the great opportunity of reading some of the writings of Swami Vivekananda. I have no doubt they have been impressed and inspired by what they have read. Vivekananda's life and teachings have prepared us for the new age of freedom in which we live. They tell us how best we can consolidate the freedom we have recently won. He was one of the great leaders of the Indian Renaissance.

Like all the great teachers of India, Vivekananda did not profess to be the formulator of a new system of thought. He interpreted for us and the world India's religious consciousness, the treasures of her past. His writings and speeches are all fortified by

quotations from the Indian scriptures and the life and sayings of his great Master, that transcendent religious genius, Shri Ramakrishna.

In the short time at my disposal it will not be possible for me to speak on more than one or two aspects of Vivekananda's teaching.

The two dominant features of our age are science and democracy. They have come to stay. We cannot ask educated people to accept the deliverances of faith without rational evidence. Whatever we are called upon to accept must be justified and supported by reason. Otherwise our religious beliefs will be reduced to wishful thinking. Modern man must learn to live with a religion which commends itself to his intellectual conscience, to the spirit of science. Besides, religion should be sustaining faith of democracy, or race. Any religion which divides man from man or supports privileges, exploitation, wars, cannot commend itself to us today.

If we are passing through a period of the eclipse of religion, of the light of heaven, it is because religions as they are practised seem to be both unscientific and undemocratic.

The most obvious fact of life is its transience. Everything in this world passes away, the written word, the painted picture, the carved stone, the heroic act. Great civilizations are subject to the law of time. The earth on which we live may one day become unfit for human habitation as the sun ages and alters. Our acts and thoughts, our deeds of heroism, our political structures are a part of history, of becoming, or process. They all belong to the world of time. Time is symbolized in India's tradition by birth and death. Is this world which is a perpetual procession of events, self-sustaining, self-maintaining, self-established, or is there a Beyond underlying it, unifying it and inspiring it, standing behind it and yet immanent in it ? Is becoming all or is there being behind it ?

Will man annihilate nothingness or will nothingness annihilate him ? This very problem, this dread, this anxiety that we have, this feeling of the precariousness of the world bears witness to the world beyond. It is a longing for life eternal in the midst of time. Because of the implicit awareness of the ultimate reality we have the sense of godforsakenness.

**Comprehension Check :**

1. Who is the speaker ?
2. On what occasion does he speak ?
3. What does the 'treasure of her past' refer to ?
4. Where from did Vivekananda collect the treasure ?
5. How are religion and science interrelated ?
6. Why should religion be the maintaining faith of democracy ?
7. What could be the reason for the eclipse of religion ?
8. What is the ultimate truth of life ?
9. How does time act as a powerful force ?
10. What explanation of the fundamental problem is provided by the Upanisads ?

**II**

By logical investigations and by personal experience, our great thinkers came to the conclusion that there is a Beyond of which all this world is the expression. The Upanisads give us an explanation of this fundamental problem. They mention logical arguments and also experiences of men who bear witness to the reality of the Supreme. What we call the Vedas are merely the registers of the spiritual experiences of the

great seer. Says Vivekananda : 'By the Vedas no books are meant. They mean the accumulated treasure of spiritual laws discovered by different persons in different times'. They are therefore ever-expanding. What is built for ever is for ever building. For Vivekananda religion is Yoga. It is personal change, adjustment, integration. It is not profession of a doctrine. It is the reconditioning of one's nature. It is not intellectual orthodoxy. It is the reconditioning of one's nature. It is not intellectual orthodoxy. It is awakening of the life of spirit in man. He wrote books on Jnana Yoga, Raja Yoga, Bhakti Yoga, Karma Yoga and urged that the goal of spiritual realization can be reached by any one of these different methods.

When we express the truths of spiritual life in intellectual forms, these latter are abstractions from live experience. They do not deal justly with the immensity and mystery of spiritual life. If we exalt the particular creeds over the universal truths, we tend to become intolerant. Intolerance is an expression of religious conceit and not humility.

We today speak of our secular attitude. We are not secular in the sense that we are indifferent to religion. We are secular because we regard all religions as sacred. We believe in freedom of conscience. Each soul has the right to choose its own path and seek God in its own way. Secularism requires us not merely to tolerate, but to understand and love other religions. Bearing in mind Shri Ramakrishna's experience, Vivekananda said: 'We Hindus do not merely tolerate. We unite ourselves with every religion, praying in the mosque of the Mohammedan, worshipping before the fire of the Zoroastrian and kneeling to the Cross of the Christian.'

In his travels abroad, Vivekananda felt miserable about the backwardness of India in several matters, the way in which religion is confused with so much obscurantism and superstition. He protested vehemently against the abuse of religion, about our

insistence on touchability and untouchability. All this was inconsistent with the great principle of our religion that the Divine is in us, in all of us, operative and alive, ready to come to the surface at the first suitable opportunity. The light which lighteth every man that cometh into the world, this antar-jyoti cannot be put out. Whether we like it or not, whether we know it or not, the Divine is in us, and the end of man consists in attaining union with the Divine.

The ultimate tests of true religions are recognition of truth and reconciliation with human beings. To overcome enemies we must possess that which far surpasses enmity, ahimsa, or renunciation of hatred.

Vivekananda raises work to the level of worship and exhorted us to seek salvation through the service of God in man. If we in our country are to profit by the teachings of Vivekananda, it is essential that we should all be interested in not only constructive work, but become dedicated spirits, spirits dedicated to the task of establishing a spiritual religion which transcends ecclesiastical organizations and doctrinal sophistries and subtleties, a religion which leads to the transformation of human society and brings it nearer to the Ramrajya or the Kingdom of God, which our prophets have set before us.

***A speech by Dr. S. Radhakrishnan***

**Comprehension check :**

1. What are the Vedas according to Vivekananda ?
2. What is Yoga in his opinion ?
3. Which Yogas have been discussed by him in his writings ?
4. What is secularism ?

5. Which experience of Sri Ramakrishna does Vivekananda teach people ?
6. What are the abuses of religion ?
7. What is 'antar-jyoti' referred to in the text ?
8. What is the ultimate test of true religion ?
9. What are necessary for creating the Ramrajya ?

### **C. Glossary :**

renaissance	: rebirth/reawakening of art, culture etc.
profess	: to claim
fortified	: strengthened
transcendent	: beyond human experience
deliverances	: the act of delivering something
commends	: presents as suitable
transience	: lasting for a short time
perpetual	: never ending
annihilate	: to destroy completely
precariousness	: uncertainty
implicit	: not directly expressed or inherent / implied
godforsaken	: not interesting or attractive in any way
exalt	: to praise highly or promote
obscurantism	: the practice of opposing enlightenment

vehemently	: strongly / forcefully
reconciliation	: setting differences / harmonising
renunciation	: the act of giving up
exhorted	: strongly advised or urged
ecclesiastical	: relating to religion specially to church
doctrinal sophistries	: unsound reasoning for principles
subtleties	: fine distinctions or the ability to make such distinctions

#### **D. Writing :**

Answer the following questions in about fifty words.

1. What made Dr. Radhakrishnan think that the students were impressed and inspired ?
2. How can we explain that Vivekananda was one of the leaders of the Indian Renaissance ?
3. Why were the writings and speeches of Vivekananda very powerful ?
4. Why does the speaker consider 'science and democracy' as the dominant features of the modern world ?
5. What could be the reasons for this earth being unfit for human habitation ?
6. Why are the Vedas ever-expanding ? And what is the light that lighteth every man ?
7. How can religion lead to the transformation of human society ?

#### **E. Activity :**

- The class is divided into four or five groups.
- Each group is asked to think of an activity, they would like to undertake as per the advice of Vivekananda.
- Each group discusses among its members.
- Each group presents its plan.
- Other groups ask questions, interact and make suggestions.

The following may be written on the blackboard or the teacher may draw the learners' attention to the text.

“If we in our country are to profit by the teachings of Vivekananda, it is essential that we should all be interested in not only *constructive work* but become *dedicated spirits, spirits dedicated to the task of establishing a spiritual religion* which transcends ecclesiastical organization and doctrinal sophistries and subtleties, a religion which leads to the transformation of human society and brings it nearer to the Ramrajya or the kingdom of God, which our prophets have set for us”.

**Questions not to be set in the examination from this topic**

