

THE VIRTUES OF WORKERS AS PRESCRIBED BY SAINT
FRANCIS XAVIER AND THE QUALITIES OF
VOLUNTEERS ACCORDING TO SWAMI VIVEKANANDA

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INTRODUCTION

Saint Francis Xavier came to India in May 1542 and spent major part of his remaining life, almost ten years in India. He is one of the prominent Christian missionaries who were responsible for the spread of Christianity in India particularly in Goa and the Southern part of India. He was the first among the members of the Society of Jesus to reach India. The Jesuits in India have distinct identity because of the nature of their work which is appreciated by Indian people.

Swami Vivekananda is one of the most prominent spiritual leaders who gave an arousing call to the Indian nation lost in stupor due to the slavery under the British rule. We will be celebrating his 150th Birth Anniversary very soon. Though both of them can be seen as moving in totally different directions in their work, there are striking similarities in the life and mission of both these towering personalities.

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SOME SIMILAR AND PARALLEL FEATURES OF FRANCIS XAVIER AND SWAMI VIVEKANANDA

- Saint Francis formally studied at the college Sainte Barbe in the University of Paris. Swami Vivekananda studied at the Presidency College and General Assembly's Institute (later on known as Scottish Church College) at Kolkata.
- Saint Francis had spiritual master in Saint Ignatius of Loyola, while Swami Vivekananda was the disciple of Shri Ramakrishna Paramahansa. Both of them were inspired by their *Guru* and their lives and works are deeply rooted in the teachings of their *Guru*.
- However initially Francis was reluctant to accept the friendship and support of Ignatius. Gradually he came under the spell of the personality and teachings of Ignatius. He remained a devout and dedicated disciple of Ignatius till the end of his life. Swami Vivekananda, known as Narendra in his youth also could not understand the affection suddenly showered on him by Ramakrishna Paramahansa and tried to resist the urge to visit him again, but he was drawn to Ramakrishna Paramahansa. In the course of time he came to regard Ramakrishna Paramahansa no less than God.
- Saint Francis Xavier was the member of the organization, Society of Jesus. Swami Vivekananda was the leader of the close group of disciples of Ramakrishna Paramahansa. Shri Ramakrishna Paramahansa himself had initiated the informal organization of monks which later on was formally established as Ramakrishna sangha.
- Saint Ignatius of Loyola wrote, «The end of this society is not only to attend to the salvation and purification of our own souls with the divine grace but to employ ourselves in procuring the salvation and perfection of our neighbour»¹. The motto of Ramakrishna Mission is, «*Atmano mokshaya, jagad hitaya cha*» which means «For the liberation of one's own soul and the wellbeing of the world». It is reflected in the activities of Ramakrishna Mission that are focused on the spiritual progress of the members of the Mission and also on the social welfare enterprises like running schools and hospitals.

¹ Quoted in Mata and Acharya, 2007.

- Though the Society of Jesus was initially blessed and recognized by the Pope John Paul III in September 1539, it took some time to gain the official written approval of the Pope to serve as representative of the Holy See. It was only after reaching India that Saint Francis Xavier came to know about the Papal approval. Swami Vivekananda reached America to participate in the first Parliament of Religions, but he was not the official delegate of any Hindu organization. Some traditional people challenged his right to renounce and become a monk claiming that he was not born in the upper castes entitled to take the formal vows as a monk. However the resounding applause he received at the Parliament of Religions removed all doubts about him.
- Saint Francis left his own country (7th April 1541) as the Apostolic Nuncio for the East and reached Goa to help his Christian brothers in India and to bring more and more people in the fold of Christianity in distant places such as China and Japan. He described it as an exile from which he never returned to his country. Swami Vivekananda left India to spread the message of his *Guru* and enlighten the West about the great philosophy of Vedanta. He toured the West for more than three years (30th July 1893 -30th December 1896) and again for the second time for about one and half year (31st July 1899- 9th December 1900). However he came back to his motherland after his first visit to West as he was as if ignited with a burning desire to uplift his nation from the loss of self esteem it had developed during the British rule.
- Both of them had a relatively short lifespan. [Francis Xavier (7.4.1504-2|3.12.1552) Swami Vivekananda (12.1.1863-4.7.1902)]

VIRTUES OF WORKERS AS PRESCRIBED BY SAINT FRANCIS XAVIER

The missions undertaken by both these exemplary leaders required a band of co-workers. When the leaders are so charismatic, many people are attracted to them. But these followers are to be trained and reared for the task that lies ahead of them. As Saint Francis belonged to the order of the Church and the Society, he had to

request the authorities to depute men with particular qualities. It was not just enough that they had taken the vows of poverty, chastity and obedience according to the norms laid down by the Society of Jesus, they needed some additional virtues for the local situation. Saint Francis had a clear idea about what he expected in the men who came to India. Francis had from his own experience realized that «in these parts they have to bear too many sorrows for the sake of Christ our Lord». So those who took up the challenge had to be perfectly prepared for it.

When Xavier arrived in Goa, the work for building a college, Santa Fe, for educating native as well as Portuguese boys for clerical state was in progress. Xavier was given the charge of the college which was later on known as the College of Saint Paul. Francis wrote to his Master Ignatius of Loyola, the General of the Society of Jesus extensively about this issue. He wrote, «I think it necessary that diligent examination should be made as to the virtues of the workers who may hereafter have to come to India. And if there are any of them whom you have not sufficiently proved in this respect, at least, I beseech you, let them be men in whom you may place great confidence. Such are the men who are wanted in India—men of singular purity and humility, with no appearance about them of pride or elation»².

Francis had realized the great responsibility that the Rector of the college had to shoulder since he had to satisfy the local governing authorities who were Portuguese and also the Church authorities. Francis wrote,

Any one whom you are to send to be Rector of the College at Goa, where he will rule the native students as well as our own people, must have, beside the other qualities which are necessary in Rectors, two recommendations in particular. In the first place, let him be conspicuous for singular obedience, so as to win by his obligingness and humility the good will of the government officials and ecclesiastical superiors. This is a place of all others where superiors of both kinds require the greatest possible degree of attention and obedience from those who are under them. If they see that we observe their wishes and obey their orders, they are wonderfully kind to us; but if they see any failing in this, they altogether turn against us.

² Coleridge, 2004, vol. 2, pp. 68-69.

In the second place, he should be very easy and gentle; affable in behaviour and speech rather than grave or severe, so as both to desire and to be able to bind to himself in very way the hearts of all, and especially of the students and brethren whom he is to rule. On no account let him be a man who would rather be feared than loved and who would take the line of keeping those of the Society who are committed to him under rule and subjection as if they were slaves³.

Francis saw the situation in the light of the ideology of the Society of Jesus which according to him «is nothing but a society of love and concord, from which all sourness and all servile fear are altogether foreign and alien»⁴. He underlined his point by stating, «I say all this, that you may pick out a man fit and adapted for the burthen of the post. He ought, in short, to be such a man as even in giving an order seems rather to desire to do what he is told than to command»⁵.

Francis has written a long letter to the members of Society at Goa about his voyage to Japan. The letter clearly displays the desire of Francis to have the members «interior perfection» the one quality that he put above all in his assistants. It shows how anxious he was to form in his assistants the true apostolic spirit. He has exhorted them to lean upon the assistance of God. He tells them,

...to meditate upon and cultivate humility with all diligence; conquer yourselves in all those things from which our depraved nature shrinks; and make it our constant work by God's grace to know yourselves thoroughly. Self-knowledge is the nurse of confidence in God, and the motive of Christian humility. It is from distrust of ourselves that confidence in God is born, true and genuine confidence. This will be the way for you to gain that true interior lowliness of mind, which in all places, and especially here, is far more necessary than you think⁶.

³ Coleridge, 2004, vol. 2, p. 69.

⁴ Coleridge, 2004, vol. 2, p. 69.

⁵ Coleridge, 2004, vol. 2, pp. 69-70.

⁶ Coleridge, 2004, vol. 2, p. 242.

QUALITIES OF VOLUNTEERS ACCORDING TO SWAMI VIVEKANANDA

Swami Vivekananda had formed the group of the monk disciples of Shri Ramakrishna. After his return from the West, Swamiji summoned all the monastic and lay disciples of Ramakrishna in a meeting and Ramakrishna Mission was formed on 1st May 1897. He had a machinery to carry out his ideas. However, much before the establishment of the mission, he had chalked out a plan for his future campaign. On his arrival at Madras (Chennai at present) after the Parliament of Religions, he was offered a stupendous welcome by the citizens of the city. The crowds were uncontrollable and he could not deliver the speech he intended to give. In the forthcoming days he addressed huge gatherings of people. He revealed to them that he had a plan to start institutions in India to train young men as preachers of the truths of the scriptures in India and outside India. He declared, «Men, men, these are wanted: everything else will be ready, but strong, vigorous, believing young men, sincere to the backbone, are wanted. [...] Make your nerves strong. What we want is muscles of iron and nerves of steel»⁷. He was convinced that a hundred such men and the world would be revolutionized. He appealed the youth with his oft quoted words «Arise, awake and stop not till the desired end is reached». He said, «Be bold and fear not». It is only in our scriptures that this adjective is given unto the Lord-*Abhiih*, *Abhiih*. We have to become *Abhiih*, fearless, and our task will be done. Arise, awake, for our country needs this tremendous sacrifice. It is the young men that will do it.

The young, the energetic, the strong, the well-built, the intellectual» —for them is the task. [...] Arise, young men... with enthusiasm in your blood. Ay, who ever saw money make the man? It is man that always makes money. The whole world has been made by the energy of man, by the power of enthusiasm, by the power of faith⁸.

Faith, confidence and strength—he demanded for the volunteers. He reiterated again and again that they should conquer weakness as he considered weakness as the greatest sin. He said,

⁷ Vivekananda, 1994, vol. 3, p. 223.

⁸ Vivekananda, 1994, vol. 3, pp. 318-319.

Faith, sympathy-fiery faith and fiery sympathy! Life is nothing, death is nothing, hunger nothing, cold nothing, Glory unto the Lord-march on, the Lord is our General. Do not look back to see who falls-forward-onward! Thus and thus we shall go on, brethren, one falls and another takes up the work⁹.

Swamiji said,

Three things are necessary for great achievements. First, feel from the heart. What is in the intellect or reason? It goes a few steps and there it stops. But through the heart comes inspiration. Love opens the most impossible gates; love is the greatest to all the secrets of the universe. [...]

Have you got the will to surmount mountain-high obstruction? If the whole world stands against you sword in hand, would you still dare to do what you think is right? If your wives and children are against you, if all your money goes, your name dies, your wealth vanishes, would you still stick to it? Would you still pursue it and go on steadily toward your own goal?

Have you got that steadfastness? If you have these three things, each one of you will work miracles¹⁰.

He share his experience in one of his speeches. He said, «When my Master left the body, we were a dozen penniless and unknown young men. Against us were a hundred powerful organizations, struggling hard to nip us in bud. But Ramakrishna had given us one great gift, the desire, and the lifelong struggle not to talk alone but to live the life...».

Neither numbers nor powers nor wealth nor learning nor eloquence nor anything else will prevail, but purity, living the life, in one word, *anubhuti*, realization. Let there be a dozen such non-souls in each country, lions who have broken their own bonds, who have touched the Infinite, whole soul is gone to *Brahman*, who care neither for wealth nor power, nor fame, and these will be enough to shake the world»¹¹.

⁹ Vivekananda, 1994, vol. 5, p. 17.

¹⁰ Vivekananda, 1994, vol. 3, pp. 226-227.

¹¹ Vivekananda, 1994, vol. 8, p. 348.

FOLLOWING THE FOOTSTEPS OF SWAMI VIVEKANANDA

Swami Vivekananda became a role model for Modern India. Ramakrishna Mission was and still is an active organization, but it is an organization of a Monastic order. Lay persons can be associated with it as devotees. Hence a need for an organization for common people was felt and the Vivekananda Kendra was founded in 1972 by Ekanathaji Ranade with the objective of establishing a living, ever-growing, dynamic memorial in the form of a Service Mission. Shri Ekanathaji Ranade was the main architect in building the great monument—the Vivekananda Rock Memorial at Kanyakumari. He raised a team of dedicated life workers for the Kendra. He has delineated the qualities of the workers of an organization in a lecture series titled «*Sadhana* of Service». He appeals the workers 'to develop the innate urge to transform yourself as a fit instrument to service. The transformation is necessary in a number of ways. It can be physical, intellectual, emotional and also pertaining to personal habits. Unless you have this transformation, you cannot serve»¹².

He states,

The devoted worker (or we may call him a life-worker, for all his life is given to the cause, there being nothing of his own individualistic concern) [...] He keeps contact with all, speaks to all and convinces all. Those who are converted to the mission are received and welcomed, but he does not boycott others and dissidents or obstructers or enemies¹³.

Following the guidelines given by Ekanathaji, Vivekananda Kendra continues to serve the people and spread the message of Swami Vivekananda. The Kendra has developed a formal system of training the volunteers who would join the movement.

CONCLUSION

As we look closely into the motivation, execution and future vision about the God given mission of Francis Xavier and Swami Vivekananda, we find many striking similarities between the ideas about the workers who devote themselves for the cause. In fine one

¹² Ranade, 2004, p. 10.

¹³ Ranade, 2004, p. 73.

can state that the divine mission even if it differs in religious, theological and philosophical foundations inspires the same urge in the followers to serve people with humility, love, confidence, obedience and faith in God. These qualities can bestow spiritual fulfillment in the face of dangers, difficulties and adversities both internal and external. It is this universal spirit of service to mankind and bringing God in the lives of the deprived that permeates the lives of the great men like Francis Xavier and Swami Vivekananda.

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