



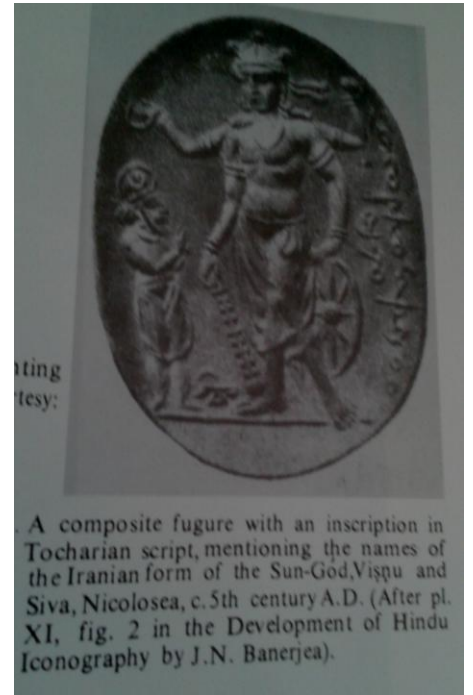
Swami Vivekananda: the anchor of Indian Renaissance 2

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The blessed Punya Bhumi of Synthesis

Swami Vivekananda in his epoch making speech at Chicago on 11th September 1893 thanked all in the name of the most ancient order of the monks, in the name of Hindu people of all classes and sects. He also thanked all in the name of the Mother of Religions i.e. India. For most of the religious expressions were founded here and even those which were brought from outside, were not just tolerated but accepted in her motherly fold. He said on another day ‘... sect after sect arose in India and seemed to shake the religion of the Vedas to its very foundations, but like the waters of the seashore in a tremendous earthquake it receded only for a while, only to return in an all-absorbing flood, a thousand times more vigorous, and when the tumult of the rush was over, these sects were all sucked in, absorbed, and assimilated into the immense body of the mother faith. From the high spiritual flights of the Vedanta philosophy, of which the latest discoveries of science seem like echoes, to the low ideas of idolatry with its multifarious mythology, the agnosticism of the Buddhists, and the atheism of the Jains, each and all have a place in the Hindu's religion.’ (The paper on Hinduism)

In his first speech in the east which was delivered in Colombo in Sri Lanka, Swami Vivekananda said, ‘If there is any land on this earth that can lay claim to be the blessed Punya Bhumi, to be the land to which all souls on this earth must come to account for Karma, the land to which every soul that is wending its way Godward must come to attain its last home, the land where humanity has attained its highest towards gentleness, towards generosity, towards purity, towards calmness, above all, the land of introspection and of spirituality — it is India. Hence, have started the founders of religions from the most ancient times, deluging the earth again and again with the pure and perennial waters of spiritual truth. Hence have proceeded the tidal waves of philosophy that have covered the earth, East or West, North or South, and hence again must start the wave which is going to spiritualise the material civilisation of the world. Here is the life-giving water with which must be quenched the burning fire of materialism which is burning the core of the hearts of millions in other lands. Believe me, my friends, this is going to be.’ This assertion of India as Punya Bhumi and her unique role of spiritualizing human race is significant especially because he said this in Colombo, in Sri Lanka, even before reaching the present territory of India. He explained that ‘what is true of the individual is equally true of the race. Each race, similarly, has a peculiar bent, each race has a peculiar *raison d'être*, each race has a peculiar mission to fulfil in the life of the world. Each race has to make its own result, to fulfil its own mission.’ There is a central note in music around which everything else rotates, so for India the central note, the message to be delivered, the mission to be accomplished is religion in its true sense, spirituality for the entire race. Therefore, in India alone there exists a correct concept of God. Everywhere there were tribal gods; Swamiji explained in another place, they would fight with each other jealously, selfishly. In India also this could have repeated. But then her innate nature, her central note helped her to realise the Truth. There was a clarion call: "That which exists is one; sages call it by various names." (his speech on Vedic religious ideals and also his first lecture in the east). People can worship images, symbols and an idol for each form helps them to transcend to the formless, it is scaffolding, an instrument. As individuals are different, each is allowed to have his or her expression and instrument to progress. Swamiji quoted *Shiv Mahimnah-stotra*: "As the different rivers, taking their start from different mountains, running straight or crooked, at last come unto the ocean, so, O Shiva, the different paths which men take through different tendencies, various though they appear, crooked or straight, all lead unto These." Though



they may take various roads, all are on the ways. Some may run a little crooked, others may run straight, but at last they will all come unto the Lord, the One. Thus he said 'It is not that Shiva is superior to Vishnu, not that Vishnu is everything and Shiva is nothing, but it is the same one whom you call either Shiva, or Vishnu, or by a hundred other names. The names are different, but it is the same one. The whole history of India you may read in these few words. The whole history has been a repetition in massive language, with tremendous power, of that one central doctrine. It was repeated in the land till it had entered into the blood of the nation, till it began to tingle with every drop of blood that flowed in its veins, till it became one with the life, part and parcel of the material of which it was composed; and thus the land was transmuted into the most wonderful land of toleration, giving the right to welcome the various religions as well as all sects into the old mother-country.'



This background will now make us appreciate the significance of Rameshwaram even more. The clashes between Shaiva and Vaishnava devotees did happen for a long time but so were these efforts for synthesis and assimilation. Here in Rameshwaram, Sri Rama, who is believed to be avatara of Vishnu, worshipped Shiva before crossing the ocean to reach Lanka and defeat Ravana. Shiva gave him blessings even though Ravana was great devotee of Shiva! Sri Rama went from Rameshwaram to Sri Lanka and after several centuries Swami Vivekananda came from Sri Lanka to Rameshwaram with this message of synthesis.

Sister Nivedita wrote in her Voice of India, 'One of the master facts of Indian history, a fact borne upon us more deeply with every hour of study, is that India is and always has been a synthesis.'

