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Swami Vivekananda and Nationalism

Feature
Swami Vivekananda's Birth Anniversary Special

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"At Cape Camorin sitting in Mother Kumari's temple, sitting on the last bit of Indian rock—I hit upon a plan: We are so many [sanyasis](#) wandering about, and teaching the people metaphysics—it is all madness. Did not our *Gurudeva* use to say, 'An empty stomach is no good for religion?' We as a nation have lost our individuality and that is the cause of all mischief in India. We have to raise the masses"

This is what Swami Vivekananda has said about the "vision of one India" he had while meditating on the "last bit of Indian rock" (later known as the Narendra Roc Memorial) at Kanyakumari. Moved by the miserable conditions of Indian masses he infused in them the sense of service and self sacrifice towards Motherland India.

"I am an Indian and every Indian is my brother." "The ignorant Indian, the poor and destitute Indian, the Brahmin Indian, the pariah Indian is my brother." "The Indian is my brother, the Indian is my life, India's gods and goddesses are my God, India's society is the cradle of my infancy, the pleasure garden of my youth, the sacred heaven, the Varanasi of my old age." "The soil of India is my highest heaven; the good of India is my good." These were some of the utterances of the patriotic saint Swami Vivekananda that fostered among Indians a consciousness of their identity as a Nation.

Though growth of Nationalism is attributed to the Western influence but Swami Vivekananda's nationalism is deeply rooted in Indian spirituality and morality. He contributed immensely to the concept of nationalism in colonial India and played a special role in steering India into the 20th Century. His influence on the youth of 20th century is iconic.

Swami Vivekananda, born Narendra Nath Datta, on 12th January, 1863 to Bhuvaneshwari Devi and Vishwanath Datta was a monk and chief disciple of [Ramakrishna](#) Paramhansa. He introduced Indian

philosophies of [Vedanta](#) and [Yoga](#) to the Western world and is credited with raising interfaith awareness, bringing [Hinduism](#) to the world stage during the late 19th century.

Dr. Radhakrishnan has observed “Nationalism is a political religion which stirs the hearts and wills of men and rouses them to service and self sacrifice in a way that no purely religious movements have done in recent times.” Much before this observation Swami Vivekananda stirred the hearts and minds of Indians with enthusiasm for strength and fearlessness; ready for service and self sacrifice for nation.

Swami Vivekananda’s nationalism is associated with spiritualism. He linked India’s regeneration to her age-old tradition of spiritual goal. He said, “Each nation has a destiny to fulfil, each nation has a message to deliver, each nation has a mission to accomplish. Therefore we must have to understand the mission of our own race, the destiny it has to fulfil, the place it has to occupy in the march of nations, the role which it has to contribute to the harmony of races”. His nationalism is based on Humanism and Universalism, the two cardinal features of Indian spiritual culture. He taught people to get rid first of self inflicted bondages and resultant miseries.

The nature of his nationalism is not materialistic but purely spiritual, which is considered to be the source of all strength of Indian life. Unlike western nationalism which is secular in nature, Swami Vivekananda’s nationalism is based on religion which is life blood of the Indian people. Deep concern for masses, freedom and equality through which one expresses self, spiritual integration of the world on the basis of universal brotherhood and “Karmyoga” a system of ethics to attain freedom both political and spiritual through selfless service make the basis of his nationalism.

His writings and speeches evoked magical effect. His words not only agitated mind of Indians but also enkindled love for the motherland. He established motherland as the only deity to be worshiped in the mind and heart of countrymen.

He galvanized the National Spirit by exposing the British policy of profiteering in complete disregard to the Indian interests. Explaining European colonial plans in Indian perspective, he demoralized British rulers. He popularized the nationalist movement that swept the country and a new India emerged. As he said, “Let a new India arise out of the peasant’s cottage grasping the plough; out of the hearts of the fisherman, the cobbler and the sweeper. Let her spring from the grocer’s shop, from beside the oven of the fritter-seller. Let her emanate from the factory, from the marts and from the markets. Let her emerge from the groves and forests, from the hills and mountains”

Courage and determination instilled by Swami Vivekananda’s speeches and writings in agitating minds and hearts of Indians to face all eventualities against all opposition were nurtured by Aurbindo Ghosh over the generation. This Indian mindset ready for supreme sacrifice provided the launching pad for success of Mahatma Gandhi’s freedom movement based on “Ahimsa” and “Satyagrah.”

Swami Vivekananda saw the spirituality as point of convergence for all religious forces of diverse India capable of unifying into a national current. Like Vivekananda, Aurbindo Ghosh and Mahatma Gandhi also realized that religion and spirituality are in the veins of Indians and worked for India’s unification through awakening the force of religion and spirituality.

His speech at Chicago in 1893 established him as the greatest figure in the Parliament of World Religions and India as the Mother of religion. Greeting the youngest of the nations on behalf of "the most

ancient order of monks in the world, the Vedic order of sannyasins, a religion which has taught the world both tolerance and universal acceptance" Swami Vivekananda quoted two illustrative passages from the "[Shiva mahimna stotram](#)": "As the different streams having their sources in different places all mingle their water in the sea, so, O Lord, the different paths which men take, through different tendencies, various though they appear, crooked or straight, all lead to Thee!" and "Whosoever comes to Me, through whatsoever form, I reach him; all men are struggling through paths that in the end lead to Me."

Despite the brevity of his speech, it voiced the spirit and sense of universality of the Parliament. His other speeches too at the Parliament had the common theme of universality, emphasizing religious tolerance

Since the onset of 21st Century, the world is in turmoil and passing through transition period of a kind. At this hour of human history the message of Swami Vivekananda promoting spiritual integration of the nation and world on the basis of universal brotherhood and goodwill becomes all the more relevant. It has the potential to avert wars ensuring peaceful co-existence of individuals and nations.

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