

Swami Vivekananda and His Nationalism

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Abstract

Nationalism is an effort to bond together those deemed to have a common ethnicity, language, culture, and historical past. It harmonizes people based on certain socio-psychological criteria which bring them together. Core to Vivekananda's conceptualization of nationalism was an endeavor to create oneness among the people of India based on their cultural heritage. It was perhaps the most appropriate at a time when people were internally divided and lacked a sense of belongingness to the collectivity. "An empty stomach is no good for religion." Says Swami Vivekananda. He considered the first duty of us to be the duty for our motherland. His nationalism was based on spiritualism, patriotism, and religion. He stressed selfless service, a sense of human dignity, and manliness for national integration. He believed that in India, religion has been a creative force instability and the influence of Swami Ji in the mind of nationalist India is well known. He is the source of inspiration to many. No one has attained such a great place in Indian history as Vivekananda in a very short time. He is like a luminous constellation in the sky of India in the form of knowledge that aroused the sleeping nation.

Keyword: Religion, Spiritualism, Nation, Nationalism, India.

Historical Background

Swami Vivekananda was born in 1863 as Narendranath Datta in a rich and respectable Bengali family of wide repute. Since childhood, he had a special bent on spiritualism. He was very influenced by her mother. He said, "I am indebted to my mother for whatever knowledge I have acquired." He became associated with the activities of the Brahmo Samaj, and in 1881 he met Swami Ramakrishna Paramahansa, the great mystic saint of Bengal. The meeting changes the life of Swami Ji and he became an ascetic and devoted himself to a life of religious effort in the cause of the regeneration of Hinduism. He played a decisive role as a philosopher of the Hindu nationalist movement.

The era in which Swami Ji lived witnessed British rule, socio-economic exploitation, and religious degradation. India was passing through a great political upheaval. Foreign rule had demoralized the people much. It had weakened the beliefs. People were deprived of the knowledge and pride of the national cultural traditions. Ignorance was entering an era of entitlement. Dark clouds of ignorance, petty-mindedness, poverty, and foreign influence had covered the sky. In such a critical time, Swami ji illuminated the entire nation with the light of his knowledge and showed the right path. He re-established the countrymen as the constituents of the living waking nation. He is like a luminous constellation in the sky of India in the form of knowledge. He revived Hinduism in India and propagated the eternal truths abroad. For this reason, he is universally seen with respect and goodwill.

Apart from being a great spiritual and philosophical saint, Swami Ji is also a spiritual democrat. He aims to make India spiritual, cultural, social, educational, economic and political development. He believes that when politics is controlled by religion and morality, then it becomes the best, it is a character-oriented policy, and it befits only the people of character.

Nationalism: A Conceptual Framework

Various factors co-operate and contribute towards the making of a nation. such as a common language, a common religion, and a common culture and social economy. Before understanding nationalism, it is important to understand the nation first. India is an ancient nation. The word Nation or Rashtra has been mentioned in many ancient texts of India. Ancient India is famous not merely for Immortal literature, unique in its vastness, variety, and longevity, but also for polities and administrations which culminated in the great empires of the Mauryas and Guptas, empires that sometimes controlled a continent stretching from Afghanistan to Mysore. Chanakya and Chandragupta, Asoka and Samudragupta, Charaka and Sushruta, Aryabhatta and Varahamihira, Nagarjuna and Palakapya are names as famous in Indian history as Vasishtha

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and Visvamisra, Valmiki and Vyasa, Kapila and Kanada, Buddha and Mahavira, Panini and Kalidasa.

Nation, nationality, and national sentiments are not the words of the modern era, but ever since the state system came into existence, these words and companions have been mentioned in some form or the other. Nationalism is the most important capital of a nation; it is a feeling that creates the national power to work psychologically. The term nationalism itself has become very broad and with nation, nation-states, nationality, faith, patriotism etc.

Nationalism was already a vital force in the public life of India. All the conditions that make for the growth of a sense of nationhood were fully developed and long known in ancient India. "The spirit, according to Hindu philosophy, clothes itself in the body in and through which it works; it needs a vehicle, an instrument, a physical framework whereby it expresses and out-shapes itself in the external world of matter. And it seems as if the same principle also applies in respect of the spirit of Nationality. It seems as if even Nationality needs a material physical basis without which it can hardly manifest and assert itself as a real existence and factor in the political world. The primary requisite for the birth and growth of a nation is the certainty, fixity, and permanence of place, and when that is assured, the other formative forces will appear and make themselves felt in due process.

The indigenous vehicles of culture played a worthy and glorious part in developing the national consciousness of a country. It is a mistake to assume that nationalism was found in the West; that is of Western thought and its growth and development. Even in the dim and distant age of remote antiquity, unilluminated by the light of historical knowledge, we find underlying principles of Nationalism chanted forth in the hymns of the Rigveda embodying the very first utterance of humanity itself. That book, one of the oldest literary records of humanity, reveals conscious and fervent attempts made by the Rishis, those profoundly wise organizers of Hindu polity and culture, to visualize the unity of their mother country, nay, to transfigure the mother earth into a living deity and enshrine her in the loving heart of the worshipper. This is best illustrated by the famous river hymn, which is invoked in an impassioned prayer by the various rivers of the Punjab, which were eminently entitled to the nation's gratitude for their invaluable contributions towards the material making of their motherland. As the mind of the devotee calls up in succession the images of these different rivers defining the limits of his country, it naturally traverses the entire area of his native land and grasps the image of the whole as a visible unit and form. Nationalism as understood in ancient India was in the sense of having a common soul-life, a common culture, a common social organization, and a common political head. It is wrong to presume that the nationalism of the East is an attempt at achieving cultural, social, and political homogeneity for fighting the West. The essence of nationalism is unity... social, religious, cultural, and political.

Swami Vivekananda and Nationalism

Unlike great personalities in the West one unique feature of Indian personalities has been the wide scope of their activities. They did not confine themselves to one particular field only but tried to reform every branch of man's life, social, religious and political. The Indian culture treats man's life as a whole and it makes no distinction between religion and politics. So, Swami Vivekananda attempted to reform Indian life as a whole.

Swami Vivekananda's historic role at the Parliament of Religion in Chicago in 1893, prepared the ground for the propagation of Hindu dualism and popularization of Hindu philosophy in the eastern hemisphere that stimulated the pride of Indian people and installed in them a sense of nationalism. The whole aim of his tour and speeches was to stimulate the pride of Indians in their religion, culture, and civilization and promote a sense of nationalism among them. He wanted to raise India from the abyss of degeneration.

Swami Vivekananda's nationalism is associated with spiritualism. He linked India's regeneration to her age-old tradition of spiritual goals. He said each nation has a destiny to fulfill, "each nation has a message to deliver, each nation has a mission to accomplish. Therefore, we must understand the mission of our race, the destiny it has to fulfill, the place it has to occupy in the march of nations, the role 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 the self-inflicted bondages and results and 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, Swami Vivekananda's nationalism is based on religion which is the blood of the Indian people. Swami Ji had a deep study of the cultural history of India that led him to form a firm conviction that spiritualism should be the soul of Indian Nationalism. Nationalism occupies the central place in his thinking. Vivekananda believed that the future greatness of India could only be built on her past greatness. He said, "I do not mean to say that political or social improvements are not necessary but what I mean is this and I want you to bear in your mind that they are secondary here and religion is primary." Swami Ji emphasizing the spiritual and theological content of nationalism remarked that "in each nation as in music, there is the main note, a central theme, upon which all others turn. Each nation has a theme, everything else is secondary. India's theme is religion." Religion in India is a creative force of Integration and stability and if and when the political authority becomes loose and weak, it imparts even to that a force of rehabilitation. Hence, he declared that national life should be organized based on the religious ideal. "India our motherland, has religion and religion alone for its basis, for its backbone, for the bedrock upon which the whole building of its life has been based." He urged the necessity of keeping religion as the backbone of the national life if the nation were to live.

In his lectures in Madras, he said, "So every improvement in India requires, first of all, an upheaval in religion. The Hindus, he felt will never accept politics without religion. He believes only in the life force. Therefore, he appealed before flooding India with socialistic or political ideas, the first deluge the land with spiritual ideas." That religious upheaval precedes a political upheaval is the lesson of history. For centuries people have been taught the theories of degradation... The masses have been told all over the world that they are not human beings... Let them have faith in themselves, for what makes the difference between Englishmen and You?... The difference is here, that the Englishmen believes in himself, and you do not. .. what we want is strength, so believe in yourselves." Swami Ji had a tremendous love for the masses. He gave a religious program for regeneration for India. He appealed to the countrymen to shed the fear complex by coming out of the national hypnotism that has enshrouded them.

Vivekananda observes that the main cause of misery in India is because India as a nation has lost its individuality. He said, "We have to give back to the nation its lost individuality and raise the masses. A nation is composed of individuals. He supplemented the individuals with a positive sense of love for the nation. He aroused a sense of deep selfless service for national cohesion and fraternity. He gave the country the idea of fearlessness and strength. He gave a clarion call to the nation which had been debased to political serfdom and economic stagnation, that suddenly realized that it had not to bend its head down in shame, inferiority, and defeatism but that it could hold up its head in legitimate pride and absolute confidence. He kindled a new zeal and fervour for the struggle for freedom in every corner of India.

His vision was to create a new India where Indian mass would be regenerated and uplifted. He exhorted, "Let her (New India) arise out of the peasant cottage, grasping the plow: out of the huts of the fisherman, the cobbler, and the sweeper. Let her spring from the grocer's shop... Let her emanate from the factory from marts and the market. In his opinion, the new India will emerge by eradicating poverty and spreading education. He said, "India is to be raised, the poor are to be fed, education is to be spread, and the evil of priestcraft is to be removed... ..More bread, more opportunity for everybody". Removal of poverty, illiteracy, and exploitation was his chief concern... he commented "No number of politics would be of any avail until the masses in India are once more well educated, well-fed, and well cared for.

Contemporary Relevance

In the days of national awakening, it can be said that the nationalism propounded by Swami Ji is one of the greatest. Swami Ji was neither a politician nor a leader yet he occupies a very important place in the Indian nationalism movement. Swami Ji's message of harmony of religions and the dangers of religious fanaticism is most relevant. The relevance of Swami Ji's continues and it is something we must deliberate upon. He said, "When the government of a county is guided by codes of laws enjoined by shastras which are the outcome of knowledge inspired by the divine genius of great sages, such a government must lead to the unbroken welfare of the rich and the poor, the wise and the ignorant, the kings and the subjects alike." In times of difficulties, his thoughts provide courage and fervour to serve the country and people. As a great nationalist, his all concepts

move around his dream of a resurgent India and converting it into a powerful nation. As it is true, we cannot become what we are by imitating others. A mere imitation is a source of weakness, for it hampers our true nature. Thus, we need to build ourselves through our beliefs. Rather than looking to the West for validation, we need to have confidence in our heritage that seeks the harmony of all. Vivekananda was clear in his vision that spirituality forms the core from which a nation derives its strength and sustenance. The material resources of a country would be no help in providing strength to it if people are not able to have a strong character drawn from the stamina that lies within them. Swami Vivekananda Ji is a well-known personality both in India and abroad since 1893. He became an inspiring personality in both the East and the West just after his speech on Hinduism at the Parliament of Religions held in Chicago in 1893. His ideas become a philosophy that is followed by people globally. In the 21st century, a youthful and zealous population of India, which is transforming tomorrow by their actions today, is living the dream of Narendramath Dutta (Swami Vivekananda), the saint with a purpose. At the tender age of 13 determined with the fervor to know the soul behind all creations, he went on to a journey that became a legend. He gave a clarion call to the nation to come up with the expectation of the moral superiority of India and set an example for others to follow. As he goes on: Thou brave one, be bold, take courage, be proud that thou art an Indian, and proudly proclaim, 'I am an Indian, every Indian is my brother'.

Conclusion

The vast diversity and rich heritage of India have contributed to the varying concepts of nation, nationality, and nationalism. It's truly said by Rabindranath Tagore that he who wants to understand India must read Vivekananda. He was not a man of politics. He neither got involved in politics nor participated in the freedom movement but his ardent love for his motherland shaped his ideas on nationalism. His burning love for India is reflected in his thoughts and speeches. His deep concern for India nurtured his nationalistic ideals. The youth of the day are mostly second-generation learners who deal with the challenges of life pragmatically; they unlike their predecessors are better equipped to question the power structures of society. However, the dilemmas facing them like employment, social recognition, and the larger question of belongingness to a particular nation are still pertinent. This makes the human resources available in this great nation vulnerable to factional propaganda Swami Vivekananda envisioned the nation as a condensed whole where employment will be a medium to serve others rather than only being a source of income. Vivekananda is such an inspiration to all Indians and people across the globe and will remain so for an indefinite time.

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