

Swami Vivekanand's Concept of 'Spiritual Nationalism': An Inquiry

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Abstract: Swami Vivekanand was a great sanyasi and bona fide nationalist. He believes that spirituality and religion both are the main theme of India. Spiritual nationalism of Vivekanand is a unique synthesis of India's cultural heritage, its civilisation and religious philosophy, and modern aspirations. Vivekananda's nationalism is based not only on political or territorial ground of nationalism but also on spiritual ethos of India for national identity. He opined that real nationalism must be rooted in spirituality, as it is the soul of Indian civilisation. Vivekananda stressed on regeneration of India through the revival of Indian culture, spiritual values, and moral strength. His vision of nationalism was inclusive, transcending caste, creed, and regional divisions, and focused on service to humanity as the highest form of patriotism. He linked the religion with nation-building to create a strong, self-reliant India that could contribute to global economy. His philosophy continues to inspire discourses on national identity, cultural resilience, and the role of spirituality in public life. He emphasised that the strength of India comes from religious and spiritual ideas. He understands that religion is backbone of India's national life. He opined that national life of Indian citizens should be organised on the basis of religious principles. Vivekananda brought back eternal things of Indian Scriptures like Vedas and Upanishads to build up country's development and faith in individuals. Vivekananda invoked the masses, worked for physical and moral strength of people and created consciousness among Indians for their country's pride towards ancient glory and greatness. Thus, he became the eminent architect of modern nationalism in Bharat (India).

Vivekananda gave importance to the concept of strength and fearlessness. Vivekananda announced that 'the essence of my religion is strength'. A nation is made only by its individuals and that is why Vivekananda requested all individuals to inculcate the qualities of prowess, human dignity and respect for all. He had deep love and compassion in his heart for poor. He used to say that for the betterment of the poor, it is important to give them education and message of spirituality. He was of the opinion that let the poor be fed and they would take care of the rest. He opined that awakening of masses is important. Vivekananda opined that India may emerge as a determined and stable nation only on the basis of religion. Thus, the paper will enquire Vivekananda's spiritual nationalism and give some insights how his ideas is relevant at present scenario.

Keywords: Swami Vivekanand, Religion, Nationalism, Spiritual Nationalism, Culture, Civilisation.

Introduction

Swami Vivekanand was genuine nationalist by heart and soul. He had firm belief that religion is the main theme of India. He truly said that, "in each nation, as in music, there is a main note, a central theme, upon which all others turn. Each nation has a theme, everything else is secondary India's theme is religion" (Panda 2014). Vivekanand's nationalism is based on religion and spirituality. Vivekananda internalised the perennial theory of moral and spiritual development through religion. He understood the importance of toleration and did not believe in imposition of religion on anyone. Therefore, despite

a religious leader and a sanyasi, he was not a sectarian one. He opined that national life of Indian people should be organised on religious principles. Vivekananda brought back eternal things of Indian Scriptures like Vedas and Upanishads to build up country's development and faith in individuals. India was not just a geographical entity for him but it was like a mother. Vivekananda invoked the masses, worked for physical and moral strength of people and created consciousness among Indians for their country's pride towards ancient glory and greatness. Vivekananda gave importance to the notion of power, strength and fearlessness. Vivekananda announced that 'the essence of my religion is strength'. According to him a religion that fails to instill strength in an individual's heart cannot truly be called a religion. For him, strength surpasses religion, as nothing holds more value than strength. According to Vivekananda the strength and power of a nation is in spirituality. Capability of individuals depends on the integrity of an individual (Panda 2014).

Nationalism

According to historians, Nationalism as a concept originated in Europe in 18th and 19th century, particularly in western Europe, and then spread to the other parts of the globe (Kumar 2016). Nationalism is an ideological and political perspective that emphasises loyalty, commitment, and affection toward one's country. It reflects a sense of unity based on shared social, historical, and cultural elements among people who see themselves as part of a nation (Kundra 2024). Nationalism is not only a political but socio-cultural ideology that asserts the pre-eminence of the nation as the main unit of collective identity, unity, and interest of a nation, often rooted in shared elements such as history, culture, language, ethnicity, and territory. Nationalism indicates for a sentiment also for an ideology. As a sentiment it develops love, affection, devotion, and respect in individual for his nation. As an ideology nationalism theorizes that the political structure or organisation of the state should be based on nationhood (Gauba 2009). Thus, nationalism is a feeling in which individual connects to a nation, in which they have common identity such as history, culture, religion, language, race, and ethnicity and deep feeling of nationhood for the state.

Spiritual Nationalism

Spiritual nationalism is concept or approach that emphasises on religion, ethical and moral values, and culture for national identity. It is not only a political or territorial notion but it includes religious and spiritual aspects for national identity. In spiritual nationalism, the nation is not only a political entity but also as a spiritual and cultural community, united by shared values, traditions, and a higher moral purpose. According to this perspective, nation would be built by inculcating inner values, strength, selfishness, courage, inner power, tolerance, unity and collective responsibility. Spiritual nationalism is an ideology that denotes spiritual identity of a nation in which a nation is considered as a spiritual entity. In Indian political thought a nation is not just a political construct but as a living, spiritual and views as a mother goddess (Bharat Mata). Swami Vivekananda, Aurobindo and Gandhi ji promoted spiritual nationalism in India. Vivekananda emphasised on regeneration of India on the basis of religious values, culture, and glorious history of India.

Swami Vivekanand's Spiritual Nationalism

Swami Vivekananda's concept of nationalism was based on India's culture and Spirituality. His idea of nationalism was not jingoistic (Netajee 2021). He linked India's rejuvenation to her old tradition of spirituality and its goals. He said, "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 fulfil, the place it has to occupy in the march of nation, the role it has to contribute to the harmony of races." India's culture is made by religious and spiritual ideals and Vivekananda emphasised on these ideals to be the basis of making new India that is Bharat. Religious principles had always been the guiding source in Indian history (Varma 2007).

Vivekananda's nationalism is based on spirituality and he linked India's regeneration with her old tradition of spiritual goals. Vivekananda's nationalism is based on two fundamental features of Indian Spiritual Culture: Humanism and universalism (Meenakshi 2023). Humanity is an essence of all religion. Vivekananda was supporter of the idea of universalism. He opined that despite all distinction

of faith, sex and colour, the essence of humanity should exist. Vivekananda upheld the concept of a universal human being, emphasising the need for a deep and powerful vision of such universality. A profound and intense vision for universal man was necessary for realisation of universal brotherhood. According to Vivekananda, India's awakening and freedom were envisioned as a pathway to the realisation of universal love and human brotherhood (Varma 2007).

Vivekananda's idea of nationalism was rooted not in materialism but in spirituality, which was observed as a source of all strength of Indian life. For him, spiritual advancement is more important than political or social improvements. 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." For him religion functions as a constructive agency that promotes societal integration and ensure societal stability in India and at the point where political authority loses its firmness or control and fail to provide stability, then religion becomes the force for reconstruction. He said "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 was of the opinion that if the nation has to keep alive then it is necessary to make religion central theme of national life. Vivekananda wanted upliftment of religion. He said in his lecture in Madras that "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." (Meenakshi 2023).

Vivekananda opined that spirituality and religion constitute an integral part of India's cultural heritage, therefore it is required to safeguard and maintain both. He endeavoured to ingrain new aspiration and hopes among Indians by reviving India's splendid glory which is rooted in spiritual energy. Vivekananda had firm believe that India stands as the motherland where spirituality thrives. He believed that spiritual realisation is the source of strength. He believed that true religion lies in realising and internalising the divinity inherent within the soul. Once a person realises divinity of his soul, all fear and hatred will be removed. Reminding Indians about India's glorious ancient heritage he explained, "India is that ancient land where wisdom made its home. This is the land where soil has been trodden by the feet of the greatest sages that ever lived." He made to realise India's religion is not superstitions, immoral customs, and rituals. His address in Chicago became an eye-opener to the west and made realise the world about the importance of Hindu religion. His historical address enriched the national pride for India (Roy 2019). Thus, Vivekananda made it clear to the world that India's religion does not talks about rituals or superstitions only but it talks about great ideals for human life also that has higher purpose beyond this material life.

Vivekananda emphasised on power and strength. He opined that "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 in yourselves." Vivekananda had deep love and compassion for the masses. Vivekananda offered a religious plan of action for regeneration of India (Meenakshi 2023). Vivekananda stressed on restoring qualities like self-dependence, self-reliance, courage, strength, determination and patriotism among Indians. For him, these qualities will make their personality strong (Roy 2019). Thus, Vivekananda gave importance to inner power and strength that can be realised through religious and spiritual awakening or consciousness.

A nation becomes a nation by its individuals and Vivekananda wanted upliftment of individuals to inculcate good qualities in them. He said, "We have to give back to the nation its lost individuality and raise the masses. A nation is composed of individuals." He wanted to inculcate constructive and patriotic sentiment within an individual. He induced a deep sense of selfless service for national cohesion and fraternity in individuals. He gave importance to the concept of courage and resilience in individuals (Meenakshi 2023). Vivekananda gave importance to human qualities; strength and fearlessness for building new India. Vivekananda wanted to build confidence in the masses and he gave considerable importance to the poor masses.

Vivekananda's dream was to build a modern and progressive India where the masses is destined to be uplifted and regenerated. He urged, "Let her (new India) arise out of the peasant cottage, grasping the plough: 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." As per his viewpoint strong India can be built through giving education to poor and eradicating poverty. He said, "India is to be raised, the poor are to be fed, education is to be spread, and the evil of priesthood is to be removed.....More bread, more opportunity for everybody". For building a new India he emphasised on removing poverty, illiteracy, and exploitation (Meenakshi 2023). According to Vivekananda, education is required for building strength in people. He said, "strength must come to the nation through education" (Raul 2013). At a time of Vivekananda, there were severe poverty in India. Therefore, he emphasised on eradicating poverty from India.

Vivekananda acknowledged the material and scientific development of the west. Vivekananda said, "As regards spirituality, the Americans are far inferior to us; but their society is far superior to ours. We will teach them our spirituality and assimilate what is best in their society." (Roy 2019). Vivekananda was very much impressed about material development of the west and wanted India should also be materially developed. He had thinking that India can learn many good things from west particularly scientific approach and modern political system and west can learn spirituality from India.

Unity is required for national progress. Vivekananda emphasised on national unity for national development. According to him, India is a nation of religious diversity and it is needed to respect others faith. He stood against all forms of religious and political extremism. He demonstrated Hindu-Muslim unity as a foundation for India's integrity and national development. In his letter to Muslim gentlemen in Nainital on June 10, 1898, he emphasised that the combined efforts of believers of Vedanta and Islam could ensure true national unity (Roy 2019).

He has deep love for India and Indian people. He said, "I am 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" (Roy 2015). Thus, He was deeply connected to the Indian people and India.

According to Vivekananda, Spiritual bond is the source of Indian life and culture (Roy 2015). During his India's travel, Vivekananda realized that deepest religious and moral impulses of masses rather than political ideal, would be the basis of Indian nationalism. Glorious religious and spiritual past would be the unifying force for making nation that would be a gift to the western world. Spirituality or religion had no narrow implications on Vivekanand. Spirituality to him are eternal human values and moral advancement. According to Vivekanand, Vedanta is the greatest treasure of rational interpretation for fabricating a modern Indian nation. His concept of Vedantic nationalism is an inimitable and substitute theory drawn up surprisingly at a time when the western theorist delivered their idea of nationalism (Raul 2013).

Vivekananda redefined the concept of freedom. For him the word "freedom" includes physical, moral, intellectual, mental and spiritual freedom (Raul 2013). Vivekananda said, "to advance towards freedom, physical, mental, and spiritual, and help others to do so is the supreme prize of man. Those social rules which stand in the way of the unfoldment of this freedom are injurious, and steps should be taken to destroy them speedily. Those institutions should be encouraged by which men advance in the path of freedom...." Vivekananda not only emphasised spiritual freedom but also advocated for the material or external freedom of the individual, recognising it as a natural right of individual. He said that "Liberty does not certainly mean the absence of obstacles in the path of misappropriation of wealth, etc., by you and me, but it is our natural right to be allowed to use own body, intelligence or wealth according to our will, without doing any harm to others; and all the members of a society ought to have the same opportunity for obtaining wealth, education, or knowledge" (Varma 2007).

Conclusion

Vivekananda was a staunch supporter of spiritual nationalism. He envisioned building a new India founded on spiritual ideals. He tried to regeneration of new India on her glorious civilisation, history and cultural and spiritual heritage. He wanted to reestablish the pride of India through uplifting the poor masses, inculcating good qualities in them, supporting education and eradication of poverty. For him spirituality is the unifying force in India. He wanted to induce power and strength in Indian people to make Indian and India strong. He supported the concept of humanism and universalism for feeling of brotherhood among individuals. Vivekananda's idea of spiritual nationalism is relevant at present time. Present India must learn from Vivekananda's idea of spiritual nationalism to build a new and modern India based on India's glorious spiritual civilisation and history.

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