

VIVEKANANDA'S CONTRIBUTION TO INDIA'S NATIONAL INTEGRATION

“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.”

- Swami Vivekananda

Sectarian violence and growing intolerance are threatening the social harmony and national security. Intolerance of all kinds, be it religious intolerance, class intolerance, caste intolerance, all have been on the rise for some time, threatening the integrity of the Nation. Caste, religious conflicts are eating into the National Integration as well as individual character.

Unlike many countries in the West and the Arab world, India is a land of diversity where people speak different languages, worship different Gods, wear different dresses, eat different foods, yet they all are parts of this great nation. What bind them together is our ancient culture and tradition which emphasize the concept of universal brotherhood.

Nobody in the modern India, was a bigger and greater brand ambassador of tolerant cultural and religious heritage of India that was originally meant to unite rather than divide the people. In his famous speech before the Parliament of Religions, Chicago. He quoted a couplet from the Vedic script to underline the spirit of Indian Tradition:

“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...!” Swamiji went on to say in the same speech, “We believe not only in universal tolerance, but we accept that all religions are true.”

Swami Vivekananda was a Hindu monk from Calcutta. He dedicated his life to awaken in the people of this country the sense of human dignity and worth. Something that was missing after centuries of oppression. He was a nationalist who, through his speeches ignited the spark of nationalism that was flickering within all of us. What differentiated him from his contemporaries is the fact that he did not look westwards for inspiration. He looked within; took inspiration from our ancient culture, and he continues to inspire generations of Indians to take pride in our culture, our traditions and our unparalleled knowledge of Vedas and Upanishads.

In Rabindranath Tagore’s words, “If you want to know India, study Vivekananda. In him everything is positive and nothing negative”. Let’s each one of us study Vivekananda.

He was the greatest architect of modern nationalism in India, without any parallel. He did not visualize India as merely a geographical entity or a heaven of opportunity for the elite. His life-long mission was: upliftment of the masses, development of their physical and moral strength, and creating in them a consciousness of the pride in the ancient glory and greatness of India. Patriotism means love of the country and country means its masses. Only Vivekananda arrived at this road through religion.

What was his idea of India that he wanted to create through invocation of religion, tradition and glorious past?

His idea of India had no place for caste, creed, color, religious supremacy or race. He recognized India’s infinite potential which lies in its values. Its spirituality which teaches people that God resides in everyone and hence no being should be harmed.

It is the very reason why great philosophies of ahimsa (non-violence), karma and Vasudheva Kutumbakam (the world is a family) originated here. India, as a millennia-old civilization has yet retained its commonness and

unity in spite of centuries of persecution. Through his extensive study of world history and the rise and fall of civilizations, he understood that role of India was far greater than conquering the world with the sword.

Integration of The Nation

Swami Vivekananda was a practical Vedantin. His interpretation of Vedanta was not theoretical. It was practical, crucial for the cultural and political integration of this country. He saw that the nameless, formless spirit could be realised through the individual spirits of the starving masses of India. He saw the Omnipotent, Omnipresent spirit in all his fellow - beings. So he dedicated his life for the service of this suffering humanity. He could not think of personal salvation, which was the goal of a Sanyasin, when the rest of the humanity is immersed in misery.

Unlike many religious and spiritual gurus, he did not ask for renunciation. He did not chant the mantra of escapism. His goal was to awaken the masses, making them realize their true potential. He knew that the resource of power of any nation is its people, not the ruling minority but the subject masses. So, the prime need of national integration was the integration of these subject masses.

What was the role of religion, or should we say, different religions, in shaping his idea of National Integration? According to him, religion teaches that every being is only one's own self multiplied. Religions demands sympathy. So, no need of blaming religion for all defects, the defect he found was that religion is only preached not practiced.

Vivekananda declared, "the essence of my religion is strength. The religion that doesn't infuse strength into the heart is no religion to me, be it of the Upanishads, the Gita or the Bhagavatam. Strength is greater than religion and nothing is greater than strength.

A nation is composed of individuals. And individuals must be spiritually, mentally, physically strong. Only then, we could dream of India being a strong nation.

Vivekananda stressed that noble virtues like manliness, a sense of human dignity and honour should be cultivated by all individuals. These individualistic qualities had to be supplemented with a positive sense of love for the neighbour. Without deep sense of selfless services, it was mere prattle to talk about national cohesion and fraternity. It was essential to identify one's ego with the ego of country and the nation. As a theorist and teacher Vivekananda has given to the country the idea of fearlessness and strength.

How was Vivekananda's nationalism different from western idea of nationalism?

Swami Vivekananda's nationalism is deeply rooted in Indian spirituality and morality. His 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".

He contributed immensely to the concept of nationalism in colonial India and played a special role in steering India into the 20th Century.

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.

Can religion unite people? Is spirituality a better solution than western idea of secularism? Like Aurbindo Ghosh and Mahatma Gandhi, Swami Vivekananda saw the spirituality as point of convergence for all religious forces of diverse India capable of unifying into a national current. What many failed to realize was the fact that religion and spirituality are in the veins of Indians. Vivekananda acknowledged this fact, 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 mahimnastotram": "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.