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## Spiritual Nationalism Reimagined: Swami Vivekananda's Philosophy of Religion as National Life

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### ABSTRACT

Swami Vivekananda was one of the greatest nationalists, spiritual teachers, monks, and philosophers of modern times in India. He introduced the Indian philosophy of Vedanta in the West. The philosophy of Vivekananda owes its origin to the thoughts of Advaita, being inspired by Sri Ramakrishna. He laid the philosophical foundations for Hindu cultural reformation and for Indian society, utilising Advaita Vedanta. He thought that Spirituality was not a means of escaping life, but a creative and dynamic force that might bring a colonised and morally broken nation back to life. The Vedantic metaphysics and pragmatic humanism developed his idea of spiritual nationalism. This ideology provided India with a cultural and a moral foundation for freedom that was not only political but also spiritual. Vivekananda reinterpreted religions, the moral strength that can unite different traditions under the idea of Universal Brotherhood and Self-realisation. He rethought- Practical Vedanta and saw a society where spiritual knowledge is the basis of education, work and rebuilding the country. This paper re-interprets Swami Vivekananda's thoughts and ideas on nationalism. The paper includes a thorough analysis of his views and suggestions studied from different sources. An effort is also made to determine how his ideas are relevant even in the present scenario and can be utilised in the development of the nation.

**Introduction:**

The embodiment of Bharat Atman, the name of Yug Avatar Swami Vivekananda, is well known not only to India but to every human being all over the world who saw the supreme god in man and whose only purpose in life was the development of this divinity within man. He is a person who showcased India's traditions, talent, and the sanctity of the motherland to the entire world at the World Parliament of Religions in 1893. This event resonated deeply in the minds of people globally, particularly those connected to Hinduism and Vedanta.

Swami Vivekananda developed a theory of nationalism based on religion, which is the lifeblood of the Indian people. According to him, if the nation were to live, we need to keep religion as the backbone of national life. Similarly, he felt that the main theme of India was religion, and through it, he wanted to convey the greatness of India to the hearts of people; as a result, it would become the backbone of a nation's life. He believed that a nation is great because of the innate greatness and goodness of its people, and religion is more important since it moulds the individuals, and the conduct of people makes them great or good. Not only that, but according to him, religion brings people's love for people, respect for each other, tolerance, and love for each other's religion, regardless of caste, creed, or religion, which is much more important as the backbone of a nation. So, he said, to save a nation, it is necessary to save the religion.

**The Objectives of the Study:**

1. To analyse Swami Vivekananda's concept of Spiritual Nationalism.
2. To examine Vivekananda's reinterpretation of religion.
3. To study the concept of Practical Vedanta.
4. To reinterpret Vivekananda's idea of 'National Life' as a spirituality-grounded framework for nation-building.

**The Methodology of the Study:**

This study is based on the books and articles related to Swami Vivekananda. Vivekananda's writings are an important source for this study. An attempt has been made to evaluate his thoughts about the reformation of the Indian people. After understanding his thoughts and works, we will realise the role of swami Vivekananda to modify the human mind to re-conduct a developed society in India.



## **SPIRITUAL NATIONALISM**

Swami Vivekananda's concept of Spiritual Humanism forms the philosophical foundation of his broader theory of Spiritual Nationalism. His nationalism was not merely political or territorial; rather, it was rooted in a spiritual understanding of human nature (Vivekananda, 1989a). At the centre of his thought lies the conviction that every individual is inherently divine. This affirmation, derived from Advaita Vedanta, becomes the ontological basis upon which his idea of nationhood is constructed (Radhakrishnan, 1998). Thus, Spiritual Nationalism in Vivekananda is not separate from Spiritual Humanism; rather, it is its collective and social expression.

The metaphysical foundation of this humanism is the non-dualistic doctrine of Advaita, which declares the essential unity of atman and Brahman (Chattopadhyaya, 1984). Vivekananda repeatedly asserted that "each soul is potentially divine" (Vivekananda, 1989b, p. 257). If the same divine reality pervades all beings, then service to humanity becomes service to God. This principle—often expressed in his teaching that serving man is serving God—constitutes the ethical core of his humanism (Vivekananda, 1989a). When applied at the collective level, this same principle becomes the foundation of Spiritual Nationalism. A nation, in his view, is not merely a political organisation but a spiritual organism composed of divine individuals (Bhattacharyya, 1999).

Unlike Western models of nationalism, which frequently emphasise political sovereignty or ethnic identity, Vivekananda's nationalism begins with the spiritual awakening of the individual (Sen, 2005). He believed that India's colonial subjugation was not only political but psychological and moral. The loss of self-confidence and spiritual awareness had weakened the nation (Vivekananda, 1994). Therefore, national regeneration required inner regeneration. Spiritual Humanism, by affirming the dignity and divinity of each person, sought to restore this lost self-respect (Rolland, 1992). When individuals realise their inherent strength, the nation as a whole rises. In this way, the transformation of the individual becomes the transformation of the nation.

Vivekananda's reinterpretation of Advaita is crucial in this transition from individual spirituality to national reconstruction. Classical Advaita often emphasised renunciation and liberation from worldly involvement. Vivekananda reoriented this philosophy toward social responsibility (Radhakrishnan, 1998). Liberation (mokṣa) was not to be understood as withdrawal from society but as the manifestation of inner divinity through selfless action (karma yoga) (Vivekananda, 1989b). Thus, Spiritual Humanism generates an ethic of service. When this ethic is directed toward the upliftment of society—especially the poor and marginalised—it evolves into Spiritual Nationalism (Bhattacharyya, 1999).



His emphasis on “man-making education” further illustrates this connection. Vivekananda declared that education is the manifestation of the perfection already in man (Vivekananda, 1989). Education, therefore, should awaken strength, fearlessness, and character. These qualities are not merely personal virtues; they are national assets. A nation becomes strong when its citizens are morally and spiritually strong (Vivekananda, 1994). Hence, his humanism is inseparable from his vision of national life. He considered religion the backbone of India’s civilisation, not as sectarian doctrine but as a moral force shaping character and unity (Vivekananda, 1994).

Another important link between Spiritual Humanism and Spiritual Nationalism lies in its universalism. At the Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1893, Vivekananda emphasised the harmony of religions and affirmed that different faiths are valid paths to the same truth (Vivekananda, 1989a). This perspective, grounded in non-dual metaphysics, fosters tolerance and interreligious harmony. Such spiritual pluralism provides a foundation for national unity in a culturally diverse society like India (Sen, 2005). Therefore, Spiritual Nationalism in Vivekananda does not promote exclusion or supremacy; rather, it promotes integration based on spiritual unity.

Furthermore, Vivekananda envisioned India as a nation with a distinctive spiritual mission. He believed that religion constituted the central theme of Indian civilisation and that the revitalisation of this spiritual core would restore national strength (Vivekananda, 1994). Spiritual Humanism thus becomes the inner content, while Spiritual Nationalism becomes its collective and historical expression. The nation embodies the shared spiritual aspirations of its people.

Importantly, because Vivekananda’s nationalism is grounded in universal spiritual unity, it avoids aggressive chauvinism. The recognition of divinity in every individual prevents nationalism from degenerating into hatred or domination (Rolland, 1992). Instead, the nation becomes a medium for collective moral growth. In this sense, his synthesis of Advaitic metaphysics and social ethics transforms nationalism into a moral and spiritual enterprise rather than a purely political project.

In conclusion, Spiritual Humanism is the philosophical nucleus of Vivekananda’s Spiritual Nationalism. By grounding human dignity in Advaita Vedanta and translating metaphysical unity into ethical service, he established a framework in which individual self-realisation and national regeneration are organically connected. The awakening of the individual soul leads to the awakening of the national soul (Vivekananda, 1989b). Thus, for Vivekananda, the path to a strong and free nation lies not merely in political struggle but in spiritual empowerment, ethical service, and the realisation of the divinity inherent in all humanity.



## Swami Vivekananda's Views on Religion

Swami Vivekananda was a follower of Vedanta. To Swami Vivekananda, religion was not only talk or doctrine or theory; to him, religion is realisation, which is man's search for the inherent divinity. Dissecting common people's ideas about religion, he said, "I do not believe in that religion, which cannot wipe away the tears of a widow. can't fit the hungry." According to him, one of the most powerful forces that has played or continues to play an effective role in shaping the destiny of mankind is religion. From all social institutions to individuals, the motivation for solidarity is derived from this religion. Vivekananda termed religion as the necessity of life; food, clothing, and shelter are important to fulfil the biological and material needs of man. Still, the hunger of his heart is not quenched by them; even in a life of ultimate happiness, man cannot be satisfied, but seeks a higher happiness or ideal, which is the logistics of life. According to Vivekananda, even for those who consider religion to be the manifestation of certain rituals, religion is not an essential requirement of life, but a long search for a demand for higher ideals, which the natural environment is unable to fulfil. In that case, religion becomes essential in life; moreover, that is an inevitability in religion that cannot be abandoned. Moreover, the national divinity of man is revealed through his character formation in being honest, selfless and in the total welfare of others, and all these things are inspired by religion. Vivekananda was human-centred in his thought and modernity, in which the absolute trust in tradition was carefully nurtured, but this tradition is not static, immovable, but changing with the needs of time. For him, religion is one of the most important human aspirations that deals with human existential issues such as liberation, freedom, death, fear, etc. Therefore, it is impossible to completely ignore or deny religion. So, finally, according to Vivekananda, although the secret of religion lies in theoretical discussion, the meaning of religion is good mentality and good action, or overall good behaviour. In his words- "He who cries, 'Lord, Lord' is not the righteous, he who does God's will."

In this way, he repeatedly talks about the nations of India through religion. Not only that, if you analyse his famous book "Lectures from Colombo to Almora", it will be seen that he has highlighted the nationalism of India through religion. On the evening of 16th January 1897 at the floral hall in Colombo, He spoke about the Hinduism as well as glamor of India is that if there is any land on this earth that can lie claim to be the blessed Puny-Bhumi, to be the land to which souls on this earth must come to account, For Karma, the land to which every soul that is wending its way Goddard must come to attain its last home, the highland where humanity has attained its highest towards gentleman, towards generosity, towards purity, calmness, the land of introspection, and spirituality--- it is India. Vivekananda says that in other nations of the world, religion is one among the many occupations of life. There is politics, there is



the enjoyment of social life, there is everything, but there is perhaps a little bit of religion. But here in India, religion is the only occupation in life. According to Swamiji, when we come to India, if you ask one of our Plowman, “Do you know anything about politics?” He will reply, “What is that?” He does not understand the socialist movements. But if you ask, “What is your religion?” He replies, “Look here, my friend, I have marked it on my forehead.” So, he can give you a good hint or two on questions of religion, which have been his experience, and that is our nation's life. According to Vivekananda, if we watch the growth and development of religions in different races, we shall always find that each tribe at the beginning has a God of its own. If the tribes are allied to each other, these gods will have a generic name. The names are different, but they are the same. In the whole history of India, we may read these few words. The whole history has been a repetition in massive language, with the tremendous power of that one central doctrine. Swami Vivekananda feels very proud by saying that we have again to learn the one Central through that was preached only here in our motherland and that has to be preached once more from India. Because not only is it in our books, but it runs through every phase of our national literature and is in the national life. He also says that here and only here alone it is practiced every day. Thus, we have to teach religion. There are other and higher lessons that India can teach, but they are only for the learned. The lessons of mildness, gentleness, forbearance, toleration, sympathy and brotherhood, everyone may learn, whether man, woman, or child, learned or unlearned, without respect of race, caste or creed “They call thee by various names; Thou art one.

### **Vivekananda’s Practical Vedanta for human development:**

Generally, Vedanta was accessible only to people who had sufficient knowledge of Sanskrit. This was because the Upanishad and the later textbooks on Vedanta were all couched in that archaic language, and Sanskrit education was accessible mainly to those from the upper class of the caste system, who formed a minuscule percentage of the entire society. Thus, even an intellectual understanding of Vedanta was unavailable for the masses. Swami Vivekananda threw open this gold mine of Vedanta literature by allowing it to be translated into the local vernaculars and into English and other foreign languages. Thus, Vedanta was down from the empyrean heights of the Himalayas onto the plains below, where the multitudes live their daily life. Thus, the Vedanta was brought down from the ivory towers of the elite into the homes, classrooms, factories and shops of the common man. While all along, Vedanta was meant to cater only to a handful of elites in the land of its discovery, Swami Vivekananda presented it in a form that made sense to the man busy in everyday society.



Long ago, Acharya Shankara had already established, using his polemical philosophy, that all men are essentially the spirit. He had also established that spirit alone exists; anything else you may see or perceive is but a wrong reading of the divine, as we explained just a little while before. Due to various exigencies of history, this grand philosophy could not be translated into a meaningful social practice. Swami Vivekananda said, “If all men and living beings are indeed the same divine being, which is established by logical reasoning, Karma (Selfless action) and Raja (Concentration).

Swami Vivekananda explored Indian philosophy and drew ethical systems based on Advaita Vedanta, offering a solution for the salvation of humankind. He recognised the energy of individual humans as a form of divinity and built tremendous positive psychology for humankind. He applied the philosophy of Advaita Vedanta to build humanity and spirituality. It all reflected his practical vedanta idealism.

The spiritual thoughts of Vivekananda have their moorings in the Vedanta philosophy, which is a systematic exposition of the Upanishads. However, he gives a modern interpretation of the ancient ideas to make them practical. He says, the Vedanta, therefore, as a religion must be intensely practical. He advocated firmly on religious tolerance and never condemned any form of religion. Once Vivekananda said, “If one religion is true, all the others must be true”. Communalism cannot make a sound society and gave his practical ideas to eliminate the troubles forever. He said to practice vedanta philosophy in our day to day lives. Swamiji wrote a letter to Sister Nivedita on 7<sup>th</sup> June 1896; “My ideal indeed can be put into a few words and that is to preach unto mankind their divinity and how to make it manifest in every moment of life”. Indeed, his philosophy can make an ideal individual in multicultural India irrespective of caste and religious evils. He supported spiritual oneness among religious to stop religious evils to stop religious conflict and to stop Brahmanical domination over lower caste people. His life was devoted to the service of the people as worship to God. Practical vedanta says individual soul as a part of God (Supreme soul) and the same is reflected in others no conflict will be there.

## Conclusion

After seeing Vivekananda’s views on religion, we can conclude that he wants the religion of India to be the universal religion. A religion like India will be the religion of other countries because what is meant by the religion of this country does not apply to other countries. So, he made religion universal, like in India. The people of other countries are ready to take up religion as a means to some special or political end. Beware of this: religion is its own end. That religion which is only a means to worldly wellbeing is not religion, whatever else it may be; and it is blasphemy against God and man to hold that man has no other end than the free and full enjoyment of all the pleasures of his senses. Religion is not in doctrines,



in dogmas; it is realisation. Religion is not going to church, or putting a mark on the forehead or dressing in a particular fashion; you may point yourselves in all the colors are the rainbow, but if the heart has not been opened, if you have not realised God, it is all vein. Religion is that which makes us realise the unchangeable one, and that is the religion for everyone. Realisation is the real religion; all the rest is only preparation-hearing a lecturer, or reading books, or reasoning is merely preparing the ground, it is not religion. According to Vivekananda, Religion is a manifestation of the divinity already in man.

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