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Swami Vivekananda's views on Nationalism: A Critical Analysis

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ABSTRACT: Swami Vivekananda held distinct views on Indian nationalism and freedom. He took an ethical or spiritual view towards freedom. Swami was quite direct in criticizing the Christian missionaries who took to proselytizing Indians without a full understanding of the social and material conditions that plagued them. When Swami says, "One cannot worship or meditate on an empty stomach," it is a statement about how external imposition fails to understand conditions of being. Swami made a distinct case towards embracing the Hinduism that was intrinsic to India. Rather than seeing it as a form of paganism or something that was demonized in many aspects of the West, Swami reverted back to this tradition in advocating a unique form of nationalist identity. Swami spoke of the Advaita Vedanta within Hinduism, the oneness of spiritual identity. When Swami speaks of Hinduism, he articulates a vision that is universal in its reach.

KEYWORDS: Swami Vivekananda, Spiritual, Freedom, Nationalist and Hinduism.

I. INTRODUCTION

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. 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.

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. Swami Vivekananda developed a theory of nationalism based on religion. According to him like music each nation had a main note a central theme compared to which everything else was secondary. India's theme according to him was religion and it had to be made the backbone of national life. The future greatness of any nation could be built only on the foundations of its past greatness.

Religion had been a creative force of integration and stability and it helped to retrieve and strengthen even political authority when it became weak. He thus advocated the organization of national life on the basis of a religious ideal. But religion in his idea was not a set of barbaric customs or a set of dogmas and rituals etc. It was rather the realization of certain eternal principles.

Swami Vivekananda held distinct views on Indian nationalism and freedom. He took an ethical or spiritual view towards freedom. Swami was quite direct in criticizing the Christian missionaries who took to proselytizing Indians without a full understanding of the social and material conditions that plagued them. When Swami says, "One cannot worship or meditate on an empty stomach," it is a statement about how external imposition fails to understand conditions of being. Swami made a distinct case towards embracing the Hinduism that was intrinsic to India. Rather than seeing it as a form of paganism or something that was demonized in many aspects of the West, Swami reverted

back to this tradition in advocating a unique form of nationalist identity. Swami spoke of the Advaita Vedanta within Hinduism, the oneness of spiritual identity. When Swami speaks of Hinduism, he articulates a vision that is universal in its reach. It pulls into it the basis of all the Western religious expressions, including Christianity. It is in this point where Swami takes a very distinct approach to what defines nationalism and freedom. Swami pivots towards indigenous religious expression in making a humanist argument against one religious form of the good dominating another.

Like Sri Aurobindo and Bipin Chandra Pal, Swami Vivekananda advocated for religious basis of nationalism. Spirituality or religion was not to be confused with rituals, social dogmas, ecclesiastical formulations and obsolete costumes. By religion Vivekananda understood the eternal principles of moral and spiritual advancement. He believed in universal toleration and not in social and religious imposition. Therefore he can't be charged with sectarianism or communalism. 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.

"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.

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.

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.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Review of related literature makes the Author fully aware with the previous work that has been done. It also provides an opportunity of gaining insight into the method, measures, subject and approaches employed.

Bhagaban, Vishno (1999) Vivekananda's soul like that of Bankim was lit with the luminous vision of mother India as a deity. To him, India didn't just mean either a geographical entity or a heaven of opportunity for the elite. Hence Vivekananda worked for awakening the masses, the development of their physical and moral strength and creating in them a consciousness of the pride in the ancient glory and greatness of India. It is therefore he was hailed as one of the great architects of modern nationalism in India.

Kanitkar, Mukul and Anoop, A.J (2019) Essential Vivekananda, Vivekananda was an ardent patriot and he had tremendous love for the country. He was the embodiment of emotional patriotism. A nation is composed of individuals. Hence 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 service 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. His outstanding legacy was that he reconciled life and religion and sometimes gave a national, almost pragmatic definition of religion: "strength is religion". 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.

Pal, B.C. (1962) The Spirit of Indian Nationalism, Vivekananda didn't pursue the negative policy of condemning the tyrannical, political and economic system that was in operation in India but positively stressed the cultivation of strength. He didn't openly advocate the cause of India's political emancipation. He couldn't do so for two reasons. Firstly, he was a Sanyasi and didn't want to get involved in political and legal controversies. Secondly, in those days the British imperialistic was firmly entrenched in India. If Vivekananda would have openly advocated the cause of political autonomy, he was sure to meet with imprisonment. That would have meant loss of his energy and detraction from the work that was dearest to his heart- the moral and religious regeneration of his country-men. Although Vivekananda didn't openly advocate any protestant theory of Indian nationalism in opposition to British imperialism, he was intensely devoted to the cause of the emancipation of the poor and the downtrodden.

Bhattacharaya, Sabyasachi (2012) "Swami Vivekananda and the Indian Freedom Struggle" With the advent of Indian freedom movement, the study of the Indian nationalism had assumed great importance. By that time Vivekananda's writings and speeches had contributed a good deal to the strengthening of the moral foundations of Bengal nationalism in theory and practice. In fact, through his writings he imparted among the nationalists a sense of pride in the past and gave a cultural confidence to people who had lost their self-esteem. At a time when the Indian intelligentsia was busy imitating the westerners, Vivekananda boldly proclaimed that the west had to learn much from India. To understand the genesis of the Indian national movement, it is highly essential to read the political literature between 1904 to 1907 which is full of the gospel and writings of Vivekananda.

III. METHODOLOGY

The method used in this paper is descriptive-evaluative method. The study is mainly review based. It is purely supported by secondary source of data, i.e. books, journals, papers and articles and internet.

IV. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Swami Vivekananda Western Disciples:

In his view politics and power in India were linked to western influence. Anyone who knows India in his opinion must understand that politics, power and even intellect form a secondary consideration. A religion is one dominant consideration in India. Preoccupation with political power was part of a distinctly western vanity and material tyranny.



Swami Vivekananda and Social Change:

He emphasized on individual morality and social change. He believed that a nation is great or good because of the innate greatness, goodness of its people and not because the state so desires and enacts legislations to that effect. Religion is more important since it moulds the individualities and conduct of people makes them great or good. In his view the spiritual tradition of Hinduism calls for resistance to the legalized oppression embodied in the crushing tyranny of castes, kings and foreigners. Swami Vivekananda's ideas influenced the theory and practice of politics in India.

V. CONCLUSION

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. Swami viewed political freedom as coming from a spiritual understanding of being in the world. Individuals could not find political freedom and nationalist identity unless there was a firm spiritual foundation from which such ideals could be revered. Swami defined nationalism and freedom as arising from an understanding of self that stresses universality of religious experience. From this point, there could be no spiritual or ethical justification for one nation occupying another. Accordingly, political freedom arises from spiritual awakening.

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