



# Indian Thinker: Swami Vivekanand (1863-1902)

## About Swami Vivekananda

- Swami Vivekananda was born Narendra Nath Datta, on 12th January, 1863.
- He 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.

## Vedanta

- It was **based on Upanishads** and their interpretation.
- Its aim was to **enquire about 'Brahman' (ultimate reality)** which was the **central concept of Upanishads**.
- It saw **Veda as the ultimate source of information** and whose authority could not be questioned.
- It emphasized on path of knowledge (jnana) as opposed to that of sacrifice (karma).
- Ultimate aim of knowledge was '**Moksha**' i.e. liberation from '**sansara**'.
  
- He established Ramakrishna Mission in 1887, named after his Guru Swami Ramakrishna Paramhansa. The institution did extensive educational and philanthropic work in India.
- He also represented India in the first Parliament of Religion held in Chicago (U.S.) in 1893.

## Core Values Of Swami Vivekanand's Philosophy

### Ethics

- Morality in both individual life and social life is mostly based on fear of societal censure.
- But Vivekananda gave a new theory of ethics and new principle of morality based on the intrinsic purity and oneness of the Atman.
- Ethics according to Vivekananda was nothing but a code of conduct that helps a man to be a good citizen.
- We should be pure because purity is our real nature, our true divine Self or Atman.
- Similarly, we should love and serve our neighbours because we are all one in the Supreme Spirit known as Paramatma or Brahman.

### Religion

- One of the most significant contributions of Swami Vivekananda to the modern world is his interpretation of religion as a universal experience of transcendent Reality, common to all humanity.
- This universal conception frees religion from the hold of superstitions, dogmatism, priest craft and intolerance.
- He believed that every religion offered a pathway to the eternal supreme - supreme freedom, supreme knowledge, supreme happiness.
- This can be accomplished by realising one's ATMA as part of PARAMATMA.

## Education

- Swami Vivekananda laid the greatest emphasis on education for the regeneration of our motherland.
- According to him, a nation is advanced in proportion as education is spread among the masses.
- He said that our process of education should be such that it helps the students to manifest their innate knowledge and power.
- He advocated a man-making character-building education.
- He said that education must make the students self-reliant and help them face the challenges of life. He was highly critical of the so-called educated who do not care for the poor and downtrodden.

## Rationality

- He was in complete agreement with the methods and results of modern science.
- He did not discard reason in favor of faith.
- He recognized intuition or inspiration as a higher faculty than reason. But the truth derived from intuition had to be explained and systematized by reason.

## Nationalism

- Though growth of Nationalism is attributed to the Western influence but Swami Vivekananda's nationalism is deeply rooted in Indian spirituality and morality.
- His nationalism is based on Humanism and Universalism, the two cardinal features of Indian spiritual culture.
- Unlike western nationalism which is secular in nature, Swami Vivekananda's nationalism is based on religion which is life blood of the Indian people.
- The basis of his nationalism are:
  - Deep concern for masses, freedom and equality through which one expresses self, spiritual integration of the world on the basis of universal brotherhood.
  - "Karmyoga" a system of ethics to attain freedom both political and spiritual through selfless service.
- His writings and speeches established motherland as the only deity to be worshiped in the mind and heart of countrymen.

## Youth

- Swamiji believed that if our youth is determined, there can be nothing impossible for them to achieve in the world.
- He urged youth to have dedication to the cause to attain success. Pursuing a challenge with utmost dedication is really the road to success, for our youth.
- Hence Swamiji called upon the youth to not only build up their mental energies, but their physical ones as well. He wanted 'muscles of iron' as well as 'nerves of steel'.
- His birthday on January 12 is celebrated as National Youth Day and the week commencing from that day is known as the National Youth Week.
- As part of National Youth Week celebrations, the Government of India holds the National Youth Festival every year.
- The youth festival aims to propagate the concept of national integration, spirit of communal harmony, brotherhood, courage and adventure amongst the youth by exhibiting their cultural prowess in a common platform.

## Conclusion

- Swami Vivekananda belonged to the 19th century, yet his message and his life are more relevant today than in the past and perhaps, will be more relevant in future.
- Persons like Swami Vivekananda do not cease to exist with their physical death - their influence and their thought, the work which they initiate, go on gaining momentum as years pass by, and ultimately, reach a fulfilment which they envisaged.

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