



**A NOTE ON SWAMI VIVEKANANDA’S VIEW ON
INTERNATIONALISM**

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Abstract

In the Bhagawat Gita the Lord had said, “Whenever there is a decline of righteousness and rise of unrighteousness, O Bharat, then I send forth myself. For the protection of the good, for the destruction of the wicked and for the establishment of righteousness, I come into being from age to age.”¹ The birth of Swami Vivekananda was probably the fulfillment of the promise held out by the Lord to mankind. Swami Vivekananda, a doyen of Indian renaissance, a social reformer, a political thinker was familiar figure of the Easter and the Western world. His life and teaching represent a unique combination of traditionalism and modernity, a synthesis of the Eastern and the Western world.

The paper seeks to attempt to focus on the political philosophy of Swami Vivekananda by concentrating on his lesser discussed concept of internationalism. The researcher’s attempt shall be to make an outline of the factors that moulded his ideas of internationalism and his sense of universal brotherhood.

Keywords: Traditionalism, Modernity, Internationalism

Swami Vivekananda was not only a staunch nationalist but also an internationalist of great repute. Vivekananda considered nationalism and internationalism as interdependent. In fact, his nationalism framed his international outlook. He was of the

view that India was the eternal abode of spiritualism. To him spirituality constitutes India's individuality. He was always in favour of the retention and expansion of its individuality. He wanted India to maintain its individuality, but he was invariably against exclusiveness in national life. He was of the view that nations became dynamic and harmonious as assimilating knowledge, scientific and spiritual. Vivekananda believed that India would become dynamic only by expanding her spiritual knowledge at home and abroad. He wanted to unite mankind on the basis of spirituality. The pursuit of spiritualism was not only in the interest of India but also in the larger interest of humanity. Spirituality formed the basis of his internationalism. He was of the opinion that nationalism is conducive to the growth of internationalism. He was of the view that the growth and expansion of a nation depend on cultivating international outlook and mutual exchange of knowledge. He postulated his internationalism on mutual exchange of knowledge among nations advocated union of nations on spiritual basis. He regarded internationalism as a cultural and spiritual necessity for nations to find fulfilment of national ideals and realisation of universal oneness. In the words of Isherwood, Vivekananda's nationalism, "was not nationalism in the smaller sense, it was a kind of super nationalism, a kind of international sublimated."²

The perception of Vivekananda's internationalism will become clear in consideration of the impact of various forces that moulded his outlook. He put forward his idea of internationalism on the basis of existence of national diversity, fostering mutual contacts and exchange of knowledge and asserting India's spiritual leadership of the world.

Vivekananda's internationalism outlook was moulded mostly by Vedanta, partly by his reaction against India's degradation and partly by experience of his life in the west. Vivekananda's faith in international unity was nourished by Vedanta. He was captivated by the concept of love and universal oneness. He preached love for all and said, 'Love makes no distinction between man and man, between an Aryan and Mlechcha, between Brahmin and a Pariah, nor even between man and woman. Love makes the whole universe as one's own home.'³ On the basis of the lesson derived from Vedanta, he regarded all nations as equal and condemned all kinds of privileges. He was of the opinion that Vedanta postulates good neighbourliness and brotherhood among nations. By

abolishing national privileges and prejudices he wanted to promote equality and unity among the nations. He pointed out, "...that between nations one is superior and the other inferior has no meaning whatsoever."⁴

To Vivekananda's nations were not different from the universe. All nations and individuals were parts of universal existence, Brahma. "Each individuals is like to bubble, and nations resemble many bubbles. Gradually these nations are joining, and I am sure the day will come when separation will vanish and that oneness to which we are all going with become manifest."⁵ It is by realising their individual nature Vivekananda hoped that nations would also realise the nature of universal unity.

Vivekananda's international outlook was moulded partly by his reaction against India's degradation. According to Vivekananda that causes of the narrow and exclusive outlook of the Indians were its backwardness, degradation and the evil practice of slavery. The falsehood on the part of the Indians in the superiority of their culture and civilization led to remain isolated from other nations. Very often, Indians were refused to contact with other countries on equal footing. India's growth was retarded due to the evil practices of cast system. Due to rigid religious prohibition even the intellectuals were also refused to go abroad. As they were suffered from superiority complex they refused to share knowledge with other peoples. The concept of social pollution among the Indian was very vital and they held others as unequals and branded them as Mlechhas, untouchable. Lamenting on the sad state of national affairs Vivekananda said, "India's doom was sealed the very day they inverted the world Mlechcha and stopped from communion with other."⁶

Vivekananda was against exclusiveness in national life. He promised Raja Ramamohan Roy for breaking India's exclusiveness. "Every one of you knows that little stir, the little life that you see in India, begins from the day when Raja Ramamohna Roy broke through the walls of that exclusiveness. Since that day, history of India has taken another turns and now it is growing with accelerated motion."⁷

Vivekananda thanked the British for their scientific outlooks. They were instrumental in expelling India's inactivity and narrow mindness. "Since the English come, they have been forcing you back into communion with other nations and you are

visibly rising again. Every one that comes out of the country confers the benefit on the whole nation, for it is by doing that alone that your horizon will expand.” For the progress of India Vivekananda was of the view that many Indians must go abroad to widen their mental horizons. He said that, “I am thoroughly convinced that no individual or nation can live by holding itself apart from the community of others and whenever such an attempt has been made under false ideas of greatness, policy or holiness – the result has always been disastrous to the secluded one. The fact of our isolation from all other nations of the world is the cause of our degeneration and its only remedy is getting back into the current of the rest of the world motion is the sign of life.”⁹

Vivekananda tried to bridge the gulf between the East and the West. He wanted to bring the East and the West together by the process of give and take of the scientific and spiritual knowledge. Vivekananda assimilated in his own personality the manliness of the West and the Saintliness of the East “Vivekananda’s own experiences of life in the East and the West showed him the imperative of internationalism. He advocated assimilation of knowledge for national growth and international understanding.”¹⁰ He acknowledges the scientific knowledge of the West. The conquest of external nature by the West was in need of spirituality and the East always adhered to the spirituality. He stressed the need of the East West coming close to each other. Science of the West and the philosophy of the East must meet at a point when humanity stood as an indivisible entity. He placed before his countrymen the splendid and invigorating message of the Vedanta which combined the spirituality of the East with the spirit of social service and organizational capacity the West. “This is what his philosophy of neo-Vedantism stands for, and which he used to effect a synthesis of cultures of the East and the West and thereby to find out the real salvation of humanity.”¹¹

According to Romain Rolland, “Vivekananda’s prolonged contact with the West made him feel more deeply the personality of India. And in contrast this made him value the strong and multiple personality of the West. Both seemed to be equally necessary, for they were complimentary, awaiting the word to unite them, the common gospel, and it was he who was to open the path to union.”¹²

Vivekananda’s faith in International Unity was also augmented by science. It is science that accelerates the Universal Unity. He pointed out that “The old lines

demarcation and differentiation are vanishing rapidly. Electricity and steam power are placing the different parts of world in Intercommunion with each other.¹³ The unity of the world on material and spiritual ground was a reality to Vivekananda. He said, “To my mind, if modern science is proving anything again and again, it is this that we are one-mentally, spiritually and physically.”¹⁴

National diversities was the basis of Vivekananda’s internationalism. Each nation has a message, mission and individuality of its own. “Each race has a part to play in this devine harmony of nations. Each race has its mission to perform, its duty to fulfil, the sum total is great harmony.”¹⁵ Vivekananda believed that nations would enrich and expand their individuality by cultivating mutual trust and love. He was in favour of national self-restrained. National self-restrained itself is a gurantee of good national behaviour in the family of nations. While dealing with other country, nations should impose self-imposed moral regulations to foster Internationalism. Vivekananda laid imphasis upon the need of International co-operation in political, economic and social field. He said, “In politics and sociology, problems that were on the nation twenty years ago can go more be solved on national grounds only. They are assuming huge proportions, gigantic shapes. They can only be solved when looked at in the broather light and International grounds. International organisation, International combination, International laws are the cry of the day. That shows the Eolidarity.”¹⁶ Vivekananda believed that International rules and regulations in a rigid form are not necessary to maintain harmony among nations.

Vivekananda wanted to strengthen International understanding and brotherhood among the people by encouraging mutual cultural contact. “He himself undertook the task of bringing the peoples of the world together by establishing mutual contacts and exchange of knowledge. He approached America and Britain with the spirit of brotherhood and with an open mind.”¹⁷

He wanted India to become an equal with the West by imparting her spiritual knowledge to the West. “Vivekananda as a person led India into the current of world cultural forces. Vivekananda as idea seeks to guide India into the world community of nations after making her a well-knit people.”¹⁸

Vivekananda wanted to consolidate the feeling of oneness among nations on the basis of spirituality. In this realm of spiritual knowledge India was superior to the West. World must be conquered by India with the message of spirituality was the dream of Vivekananda. He warned that the failure of India in her campaign of spirituality would be of serious consequence to humanity. He believed that it was the historic mission of India to lead the countries of the world to spiritual unity. “The whole universe is one existence. There cannot be anything else. Out of diversities we are all going towards the universal existence. Families into tribes, tribes into races, races into nations, nations into humanity – how many wills going to the one. It is all knowledge, all science – the realisation of this unity.”¹⁹

Vivekananda’s political philosophy revolves round the spiritual integrity of mankind. Vivekananda’s concept of harmony and spiritual unity of nations was based on his conviction in Vedanta. To him Vedanta was a universal religion and it would provide the basis for unity of nations. Vivekananda believed that on the basis of Vedanta all national and international problems could be solved.

Vivekananda was in favour of all round progress and perfection of the human race. Following the thought of Vivekananda, Romach Rolland advised Europe to meet Asia, “She is working for us. We are working for her. Europe and Asia are two halves of the soul.”²⁰

Vivekananda’s internationalism grew out of his nationalism. There was no narrowness or exclusiveness in his nationalism. “Intense was his love for his country, his love was not confined to his country alone. There was nothing chauvinistic about his patriotism. His heart was large enough to take within its embrace the whole of humanity. His ultimate ideal was internationalism and brotherhood of man.”²¹

Vivekananda wanted co-ordination and unity among the nations. He maintained neither the supremacy of nationalism at the cost of internationalism nor internationalism at the cost of national individuality. “The unity of the world was crystal clear to him on scientific and spiritual basis. He hoped that in due course internationalism would become a way of religious life on the part of individuals and nations. Growth of internationalism depends on the extent of a wakening of humanity to the spiritual concept of universal oneness.”²²

Vivekananda was a world teacher who tried to infuse into mankind the essence of unity. He dreamt of a parliament of man for the final victory of the human spirit against the dark forces of ignorance. "Vivekananda visualised a new type of civilization and culture for good of humanity in which the differences between the East and the West could be eliminated."²³ Vivekananda was against the tendency of isolation and urged Indians to assimilate the best that had been accumulated by the people of the world. His urge was to combine Indian Spiritualism with western materialism in order to produce synthetic culture, suited to the need of the modern man. His commitment to modernity and to rid India of social ill and evils was indeed, commendable.

Vivekananda strongly believe both in nationalism and internationalism. He categorically stated that internationalism is a necessity for the nation's growth. He proclaimed the modern age as the era of synthesis. The principle of moderation and synthesis ensures and envisages growth of individual, society and humanity. The philosophy of moderation, growth and synthesis as advocated by Vivekananda cannot go astray from the path of progress, prosperity and harmony. The political philosophy of Vivekananda are relevant to all societies – the developed, the underdeveloped and he underdeveloped at any given time. The interpretation of his political ideals are spiritually oriented and still need to be systematised. His political thought is Indian in orientation and European in environment. Though his political thought is moderate and balanced, his political ideals and concepts require further interpretation and assessment.

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