

Swami Vivekananda And Cultural Nationalism: An Overview

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Abstract-- Nationalism fosters pride in national accomplishments and is intimately associated with patriotism. It advocates for preserving national sovereignty and indigenous culture. A nationalist thinker attempts to attach honours for one's soil. Swami Vivekananda, a nationalist ideologue, dedicated his brief yet impactful life to the elevation of his compatriots and diligently labored for the liberation of his homeland from political, religious, economic, and cultural subjugation, fulfilling the qualification of a genuine nationalist. His worldview was fundamentally anchored in India's ancient spiritual traditions, highlighting the intrinsic unity of the nation through a common cultural and philosophical legacy. Vivekananda conceptualized a cultural nationalism that surpassed political confines, emphasizing spiritual revival, self-sufficiency, and social advancement. His promotion of Vedantic philosophy as the basis of national identity distinguished him. He claimed that authentic nationalism resided in revitalizing the inherent strength of the populace by reestablishing their connection to traditions, arts, and intellectual wisdom. Education was pivotal in this resurgence, as he regarded it as a vehicle for fostering confidence, character, and service-oriented leadership in the youth. His comprehensive vision was to empower all communities, promoting interfaith cooperation and religious coexistence within the overarching idea of Vedantic tolerance. His dialogue continues to influence contemporary Indian nationalism, affecting politicians, organizations, and cultural movements that prioritize self-reliance, national pride, and unity in diversity. As Bharat confronts the intricacies of modernity and globalization, Vivekananda's principles offer a perennial foundation for a culturally enriched and spiritually enlightened nation. This paper unravels India cultural nationalism through the lens of Swami Vivekanand.

Keywords-- Cultural, Nationalism, Sovereignty, Culture, Vedantic, etc.

I. INTRODUCTION

The idea of nationalism has been a powerful force in shaping the modern world, with nations often constructed around shared linguistic, ethnic, or cultural traits. It advocates for self-governance, aiming to preserve national unity and cohesion. It fosters pride in national accomplishments and is intimately associated with patriotism. In the Indian context, cultural nationalism is a particularly complex and layered concept, reflecting the country's deep historical roots, diverse cultures, and philosophical traditions.

The notion of a Bharatiya nation predates colonial interventions, drawing from ancient texts and collective consciousness that envisioned a cultural unity beyond political boundaries. Cultural nationalism in Bharat is an intricate blend of history, tradition, and philosophy, shaping national identity beyond mere political constructs (Rabindranath Tagore, 1942).

Swami Vivekananda's thoughts on Nationalism emphasize the spiritual and cultural unity of the Indian subcontinent ascending India as a beacon of universalism and humanism ("Exploring Pluralistic Indian Nationalism," 2025). Swami Vivekananda dedicated his brief yet impactful life to the elevation of his compatriots and diligently laboured for the liberation of his homeland from political, religious, economic, and cultural subjugation, thereby justifying his designation as an epitome of nationalism or a genuine nationalist.

II. CULTURAL NATIONALISM IN INDIA: FOUNDATIONS

Cultural nationalism in India is not merely about political sovereignty but about reclaiming and revitalizing cultural ethos that binds the diverse populace. Central to this idea is the concept of 'Bharatvarsha', a term that appears in ancient texts like the Mahabharata and the Vishnu Purana, referring to a land unified by shared values, dharma (righteousness), and a common civilizational heritage (Savarkar, 2021).

Philosophers and reformers of the 19th and 20th centuries, like Swami Vivekananda and others like Aurobindo Ghosh articulated visions of India that emphasized spiritual unity and cultural strength. They viewed India as a spiritual organism, whose identity was rooted in the perennial philosophy of Vedanta and the inclusive practices of Sanatana Dharma (Jagadisha Bhatia, n.d.) While political nationalism seeks to define a nation based on political sovereignty and territorial boundaries, cultural nationalism emphasizes the unity of a people through shared cultural heritage. In India, this distinction is significant, as the concept of 'Bharatiya' encompasses a syncretic culture formed through centuries of interactions among various ethnicities, languages, and religions.

The struggle for independence in the 20th century saw these two forms of nationalism converge, with leaders like Mahatma Gandhi and Bal Gangadhar Tilak invoking cultural symbols and spiritual ideas to galvanize the masses.



The symbolic uses of 'Ram Rajya' as an ideal state and the adoption of symbols like the charkha (spinning wheel) were attempts to root the freedom struggle in indigenous cultural traditions.

III. ESSENCE OF VIVEKANANDA'S NATIONALISM

Swami Vivekananda's vision of cultural nationalism offers a holistic perspective, integrating spirituality, education, and social harmony. His emphasis on national rejuvenation through cultural pride and self-awakening remains relevant in contemporary India, guiding the country's pursuit of unity in diversity. Vivekananda espoused Karma, morality, and fearlessness; he emphasized the Upanishads, the Brahma Sutras, and the Bhagavad Gita as the three principal old Vedanta texts prompting him to be a proponent of spiritual nationalism ("Exploring Pluralistic Indian Nationalism," 2025).

IV. KEY PRINCIPLES OF HIS THOUGHTS

a) *Spiritual Unity and National Identity*

Vivekananda believed that India's strength lay in its spiritual heritage, which provided a sense of unity transcending caste, creed, and regional identities. He saw Vedanta as the philosophical foundation of Indian nationalism, emphasizing oneness and the interconnectivity of all beings. Spiritual Unity among the Indians as per Vivekananda arouses the nation in the following ways:

- The strength of the nation is in spiritual unity.
- Each nation represents one theme in life.
- Sacrifice, love to unite a nation.
- The nation must hold to national status and institutions

He attempted to launch spirituality for freedom of the motherland. Sister Nivedita wrote,

"He was a worker at foundations... he was born a lover, and queen of his adoration was his Motherland. To him, the thought of India was like the air he breathed". (Sister Nivedita, n.d.)

He taught us to get rid of the first of self-inflicted bondages and ultimate miseries. Without awareness of humanity and fraternity, a nation never achieves its oneness and solid foundation. ("Exploring Pluralistic Indian Nationalism," 2025)

b) *Revival of Cultural Heritage*

His speeches and writings often called for a renaissance of Indian thought, encouraging the youth to take pride in their cultural legacy. He stressed the need to reconnect with India's ancient wisdom, arts, and philosophy while modernizing them for contemporary needs.

Swami ji held- *"Each nation has a destiny to fulfil, each nation has a message to deliver, each nation has a mission to accomplish."*

Vedanta always preached the Universalism of all soul cutting the barriers of social evils. Humanism can't be established in society without spiritual oneness among people. His nationalism was not materialistic, but purely spiritual considered to be the source of strength of the nation. According to Vivekananda, the national regeneration of India would begin when Indians become fearless and would protest against oppressive foreign rulers.

c) *Education as a Tool for National Awakening*

Vivekananda advocated for an education system rooted in Indian values, blending modern scientific knowledge with spiritual wisdom. He emphasized character-building, self-confidence, and service to humanity as essential components of national progress. He left a message to the young people through his famous slogan-*"Arise, awake, and stop not till the goal is reached."*

He believed that education should be a means of promoting self-reliance and universal brotherhood. As per him, education is a continuous process; it should cover all aspects of life physical, material, intellectual, emotional, moral and spiritual. The masses should be educated before anything else is done. In 'Raja Yoga' he says *"Each soul is potentially divine."* All knowledge—secular or spiritual—is in the human mind. Knowledge is inherent in man, no knowledge comes from outside, it is all inside. An individual simply discovers the knowledge inherent in him. When the covering is being slowly taken off, learning takes place. Man must discover himself. The discover will help the expansion and enrichment of the soul. The student has himself to discover, himself to learn and himself to teach. Thus, according to Vivekananda, education is the discovery of the inner self. For Vivekananda education is not the amount of information put in to one's brain, which may be there undigested all one's life. It is rather a life-building assimilation of ideas. Real education is that which one can stand on one's feet. Swamiji says *"The end of all education, all training should be man-making."* Creation of self-confidence and self-realisation should also form the aims of education. Education must make a man conscious of his hidden powers.

In Swamiji's own words: *"Faith in our self and faith in God-this is the secret of greatness."* He says *"The end of education is character-building."* Vivekananda lays emphasis on the discovery of inner knowledge. Until the inner teach opens, all outside teaching is vain.

d) Social Reform as an essential tool of Nationalism

Vivekananda's nationalism was not exclusionary; rather, it encompassed all sections of society. He wanted for the eradication of social evils such as caste discrimination, untouchability and gender inequality. He urged for empowerment of the marginalized, particularly women and the poor, whom he saw as the backbone of India's resurgence. He vouched for interfaith harmony, advocating the coexistence of all religions under the broader philosophy of Vedantic tolerance. He observed-

"We believe not only in universal toleration but we accept all religions as true."

Vivekananda believed unity in diversity was the law of nature and that Hinduism recognizes this reality. (*Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda Nine Volumes: Swami Vivekananda: Internet Archive, n.d.*)

V. IMPACT OF VIVEKANANDA'S THOUGHTS ON MODERN INDIAN NATIONALISM

Vivekananda has influenced leaders like Mahatma Gandhi, Subhas Chandra Bose, and Aurobindo Ghosh through his ideas and way of thinking. He continues to shape contemporary debates on Indian identity, self-reliance, and cultural pride. Occasionally, certain researchers have perceived Swami Vivekananda as a Hindu supremacist masquerading as a liberal advocate for interreligious cooperation. In his provocative book, *A Restatement of Religion: Swami Vivekananda and the Making of Hindu Nationalism* (2013), Jyotirmaya Sharma emulates their approach. Sharma asserts that Vivekananda was "the progenitor and instructor" of Hindutva, "a Hindu nationalist who supported the prevailing caste system, disparaged non-Hindu religions, and diverged from his mentor Sri Ramakrishna's more progressive and egalitarian doctrines. However, there are writers like Swami Medhananda who have countered such hypotheses. ("Was Swami Vivekananda a Hindu Supremacist?," 2024)

VI. CONCLUSION

Cultural nationalism in India presents a rich tapestry of ideas about identity, belonging, and the meaning of nationhood. The concept of an existing Bharatiya nation challenges us to think beyond political borders and engage with the deep cultural continuities that shape collective consciousness. As India continues to navigate its identity in the modern world, the dialogue between cultural and political nationalism remains vital, shaping the country's future trajectory.

Swami Vivekananda is one of the most influential figures in the discourse on cultural nationalism in Bharat. His ideas on nationalism were deeply rooted in India's spiritual traditions and cultural heritage. He envisioned India's resurgence through a synthesis of spirituality, education, and self-reliance. It also analyses the impact of his ideas on contemporary Indian nationalism.

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