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Prof. Nair, educated in traditional and modern lines in Sanskrit Grammar, other Sastras and modern linguistics, taught in Colleges and University for more than 38 years and retired in 2007 as Professor and Head, Department of Sanskrit Vyakarana, S.S. University of Skt. Still he continues his teaching career without receiving any remuneration. His students in various Sanskrit Sastras are spread in many continents. He started spoken Sanskrit classes in 1979 to save Sanskrit from the then prevailing vicious propaganda that Sanskrit was a dead language. Now his students are propagating spoken Sanskrit as well as ancient Indian Sastras in Europe and America. His online classes on Paninian Grammar, Sanskrit Linguistics, Vedic Language, Vedas, Nirukta, Upanishads, Yogasastra, Arthasastra, Mimamsa, Dhvanyaloka, etc., are highly appreciated by students in India and abroad for their clarity, critical approach and simple style. He occupied several honorary academic positions in many Universities. He was honoured at several national and international forums.



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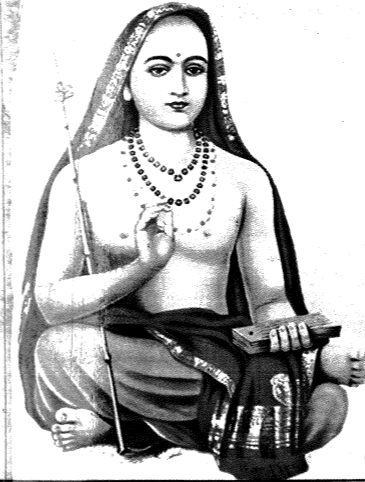
Sree Sankaracharya University of Sanskrit

Vision and Mission of Swami Vivekananda National Seminar Proceedings

General Editors

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Dr. (Prof) G. GANGADHARAN NAIR



Swami Vivekananda Chair
Sree Sankaracharya University of Sanskrit, Kalady
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EDITOR'S NOTE

Sree Sankaracharya University of Sanskrit, Kalady, has established a chair in the name of Swami Vivekananda. This is the single unique chair allotted by the UGC in the whole of South India. Dr. K.T. Jaleel, the Hon'ble Minister for Local Self Govt. Kerala State, inaugurated the chair at the main campus on 13th January 2017. Dr. K.T. Jaleel stated that Swami Vivekananda was a revolutionary spiritual master who combined the inner meanings of various religions. Sri. Roji. M. John. M.L.A. presided over the session. Dr. M.C. Dileepkumar, Hon'ble Vice-Chancellor, delivered the introductory speech. Adv. K. Tulasi, the State President of Kerala Grama Panchayat Association, delivered the key note address. I am deeply indebted to all these dignitaries who made the inaugural ceremony a grand success.

Swami Vivekananda Jayanthi Celebrations were conducted under the auspices of the chair all over Kerala through the Sree Sankaracharya University of Sanskrit and its centers. Competitions, quiz programmes, seminars, lectures etc., were included based on the life and teachings of Swami Vivekananda in the Vivekananda Jayanthi Celebrations. Public participation was also ensured by the activities of the chair. I am also grateful to all Campus Directors of the University, Local bodies and Co-ordinators for their valuable guidance and co-operation to make the celebration a success.

A three day National Seminar entitled "Swami Vivekananda's Vision and Mission" was conducted by the chair with the co - operation of Kerala Bhasha Institute, Thiruvananthapuram. Eminent Scholars participated and presented more than seventy papers. The success of the National Seminar depended entirely upon the active participation of the teachers and researchers in various Universities and Colleges, learned public and the joint co-operation of the Kerala Bhasha Institute. There were six sessions in the seminar including inaugural and valedictory sessions. The four sessions were

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SWAMI VIVEKANANDA - THE INTELLECTUAL DILEMMA

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Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902) was born in an age of tantalizing changes. In America, abolition of slavery was proclaimed by Abraham Lincoln in the very same year of Vivekananda's birth. Europe was at the peak of Industrial revolution and Marx and Engels had written the manifesto of the Communist Party, but 'The Capital' was waiting to be written. The word 'feminism' had entered the Oxford English Dictionary. In India, the national politics was in a resting phase following the defeat of the revolt of 1857. Western education and western culture was slowly creeping into the daily life of Indian elite. At Calcutta, Rajaram Mohan Roy had left the stage but Brahmo Samaj and Tatvabodhini Sabha, though weak, were on with the job. The formation of Arya Samaj was very much in the air. In Kerala, Ayyankali was born in the very same year of Vivekananda's birth and Sri Narayana guru must have started his early education by then.

The stage which set the intellectual life of Swamy Vivekananda is quite a reflection of the era. As already stated, globally, it was an age of transition. The new values of freedom, equality, human rights etc were fast flowing in to the socio political fabric of India. At the same time, there was a looming fear of the British attempts to 'destroy' the Religion and Culture of India. Vivekananda himself belonged to an influential 'Kayastha' family of Calcutta and was well exposed to western ideas which he could not ignore. At the same time, he strongly believed that India was ahead of Europe both spiritually and culturally.

The major source of literature about Swami Vivekananda is his 'Complete works', which was published posthumously in 1907, five years after his death. The volumes contain, apart from his original works, his speeches, interviews, classes, letters and the newspaper reports about him published in eastern and western media, memoir of his disciples and close associates etc. Anyone who goes through the 'Complete works of Vivekananda' will get a clear picture of how the confusion of the times had impacted his thoughts. On one side, being progressive and with a direct exposure to the world through his education and the journeys he undertook, he was receptive to the new intellectual changes and upheld the values of science, secularism, tolerance and equality. He also vehemently condemned the evils of caste society, the bigotry and greed of the priestly class. At the same time, with a missionary zeal, he tried to uphold whatever he thought was unique to India and its cultural heredity. Vivekananda thus left two legacies.

On one side, his contributions were instrumental in revival of yoga and study of ancient Indian religious literature. He went to the extent of attempting to establish that there is nothing beyond the scope of Hinduism and stated that:-

"From the high spiritual flights of the Vedanta philosophy, of which the latest discoveries of science seem like echoes, to the low ideas of idolatry with its multifarious mythology, the agnosticism of the Buddhists, and the atheism of the Jainas, each and all have a place in the Hindu religion" (Complete works -Vol I- p 8).

He often justified caste system and even opposed the reformatory movements that were active during his times. Moderately criticizing the reformatory movements of Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Vivekananda stated that "For the last three-quarters of a century, India has been bubbling over with reform societies and reformers. But, alas,

every one of them has proved a failure. They did not know the secret. They had not learnt the great lesson to be learnt. In their haste, they laid all the evils in our society at the door of religion; and like the man in the story, wanting to kill the mosquito that sat on a friend's forehead, they were trying to deal such heavy blows as would have killed man and mosquito together." (Complete works-Vol- IV-143)

This revivalism and resistance to reforms was later assessed to be a reaction to colonialism and its cultural hegemony. Bipin Chandra points out that the cultivation of vernacular languages, the creation of an alternate system of education, the efforts to regenerate Indian art and literature, the emphasis on Indian dress and food, the defense of religion and the attempts to revitalize the Indian system of medicine, the attempt to probe the potentialities of pre-colonial technology, and to reconstruct the traditional knowledge were some of the expressions of this concern (against the intrusion of colonial culture and ideology). Vivekananda also vehemently opposed the proselytizing attitude of Islam and Christianity.

The prime concern of Vivekananda was religion and was an out and out Advaitin who firmly believed that India was the best nation in the world with best citizens who were corrupted by foreign influence.

"There is no zenana in the Himalayas, and there is a part of India which the missionaries never reach. These villages are most difficult of access. These people, untouched by Mahometan influence, can but be reached by wearisome and toilsome climbing, and are unknown to Mahometan and Christian alike" (The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda- Volume III- P- 421)

He adds

When the studious Greeks visited Hindustan to learn of the Hindu, all doors were open to them, but when the

Mohammedan with his sword and the Englishman with his bullets came their doors were closed. Such guests were not welcomed" (Vol 3-424)

In his 'Bunch of thoughts', M.S.Golwalkar quotes Vivekananda extensively in support his ideas. He writes "Swami Vivekananda used to say, -I want men with muscles of iron and nerves of steel"... Don't sit down and weep like little girls". In order to emphasize the primacy of India over other lands, he further quotes Vivekananda as follows "If there is any land on this earth that can lay claim to be the blessed Punyabhoomi, to be the land to which every soul that is wending its way Godward must come to attain its last home, it is Bharat."

Golwalkar further quotes Vivekananda to emphasize his claim that India is Hindu nation and states that

"Swami Vivekananda, the great harbinger of our national renaissance in modern times, had time and again declared in unequivocal terms that this is Hindu Nation and placed before us the great Hindu ideals of Guru Govind Singh and Chhatrapati Shivaji"

Hence, it is a fact that the thoughts of Vivekananda fueled Hindu Nationalism. But on the other side we find the same Vivekananda upholding the values which oppose such reductionist view of religion and Indian history. Alternately, he upholds the ideas of universal Religion, Secularism, Scientific temper against religious claims, criticism of existing religious practices and even sidelines spiritual priorities. In personal life, Vivekananda was very liberal and tolerant to cultural differences.

Vivekananda was one of the early thinkers in India to realize that religion should stand the tests of science and logic. In his speech on 'Reason and Religion' conducted at London (Complete works – Vol 1) while answering a point whether 'Are the same methods of investigation, which we apply to sciences and knowledge outside, to

be applied to the science of Religion' he emphatically clarifies affirmatively and states that

“In my opinion this must be so, and I am also of opinion that the sooner it is done the better. If a religion is destroyed by such investigations, it was then all the time useless, unworthy superstition; and the sooner it goes the better. I am thoroughly convinced that its destruction would be the best thing that could happen”.

Here we can see a parallel between Rene Descartes and Vivekananda. Descartes, who was intensely religious like Vivekananda too found that the arguments of religion could not withstand the onslaught of new scientific developments and hence devised a method to base religion and its fundamental concepts like God, Soul and World on scientific footing. Using his rationalism, he built an un-doubtable axiom, the famous 'Cogito ergo Sum' and proceeded to deduct all other religious truths from this self evident axiom. We can see the same methods being employed by Vivekananda to justify his religion. First he emphasized. We find that Vivekananda had employed a method very similar to proving religion from existence of 'Self', just like Descartes proved his religion from his 'Cogito' argument.

“The proof of religion depends on the truth of the constitution of man, and not on any books” (Ibid-Vol 1)

Hence like Descartes, Vivekananda bases his proof of religion on the existence of Man and brings in a semblance of scientific method to prove religion. His criticism of priesthood and magical religion goes hand in hand with this scientific temper. Vivekananda, unequivocal terms, state that 'Priestcraft is the bane of India' (Vol IV- p 268) and adds that Priestcraft is in its nature cruel and heartless.

That is why religion goes down where priestcraft arises. Vivekananda also fully knew it was futile to speak of religion to the starving. Though he upheld the idea of non possession as a monk, he was very well aware of the pressing economic needs of the people. He writes-

“Bread! Bread! I do not believe in a God, who cannot give me bread here, giving me eternal bliss in heaven! Pooh! India is to be raised, the poor are to be fed, education is to be spread, and the evil of priest craft is to be removed. No priestcraft, no social tyranny! More bread, more opportunity for everybody!” (Vol IV- p 232).

Vivekananda strongly supported caste system and at one stage stated that the reason for Indias downfall was giving up the idea of caste and quotes Gita to prove his point. “As Gitâ says, with the extinction of caste the world will be destroyed”. (Vol IV- P305). His views of caste were similar to that of Mahatma Gandhi. While justifying caste in support of tradition, he tried to argue that caste discrimination was not sanctioned by scriptures and that caste was not hereditary in the olden days. But he goes on to add

“There is something in caste, so far as it means blood; such a thing as heredity there is, certainly. Now try to [understand] — why do you not mix your blood with the Negroes, the American Indians? Nature will not allow you. Nature does not allow you to mix your blood with them. There is the unconscious working that saves the race. That was the Aryan's caste. Mind you, I do not say that they are not equal to us. They must have the same privileges and advantages, and everything; but we know that if certain races mix up, they become degraded” (Vol 3- p 443).

There is something curious in this argument. That is the similarity with the views of Abraham Lincoln. Lincoln became a martyr for voicing the cause of blacks. However, it will be surprising to know that he did not believe in equality of blacks with whites. He was against voting rights for blacks. Blacks holding public offices or inter marrying with whites were out of question for him¹. Likewise, Vivekananda demanded the upliftment of women and untouchables, but he did not believe in equality. But that was the limitation of the dominant ideology of the times. But he goes on to add that the day of the Sudra will come and also that in the long term, mixing of castes will bring forth better men.

Though the Hindu forces often claim Vivekananda to be a champion of Hindu Cause, it is far from Truth. In complete works, there are many instances to repudiate such claims. He writes

“May He who is the Brahman of the Hindus, the Ahura-Mazda of the Zoroastrians, the Buddha of the Buddhists, the Jehovah of the Jews, the Father in Heaven of the Christians, give strength to you to carry out your noble idea!” (p 19- Vol I).

Vivekananda was also the arch enemy of sectarianism and bigotry. This is how he penned his opinion in this aspect.

“Sectarianism, bigotry, and its horrible descendant, fanaticism, have long possessed this beautiful earth. They have filled the earth with violence, drenched it often and often with human blood, destroyed civilisation and sent whole nations to despair. Had it not been for these horrible demons, human society would be far more advanced than it is now” (Vol 1-p 431).

Superstition is a great enemy of man, but bigotry is worse.
Added Vivekananda.

What we find here is two streams to which his thoughts later branched off. On one side, it fueled fanaticism, sectarianism, false pride in the nation's cultural history and portrayed Christians and Muslims as the destroyer of India's pristine pure culture. At the same time, he has also provided sufficient strength to fight social evils and to stand up for the rights of starving human race and their dignity, again in the name of religion. We can see him subjecting religion to the test of science but alternately, also as declaring that religion is above all science and science can't grasp religion. But this dichotomy of views is not unique to Vivekananda, but can be traced in other Indian intellectuals of the 19th Century too. Well, the dilemma is the natural predicament of the Indian intellectual of the late 19th century.

Reference.

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