



**SWAMI VIVEKANANDA AND THE  
MAKING OF MODERN BHARATA**

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*Swami Vivekananda Maker of Modern India*

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***Abstract***

*The evolution of Modern Bharata started along with the national struggle for freedom. It was almost a part and parcel of the national movement. Swami Vivekananda not only envisaged a politically free and sovereign state, he also envisaged the transformation of Bharata into a modern nation.*

*His life, vision and thoughts played an epochal role in both the freedom struggle and making Bharata a modern nation. His vision and foresight for the evolution of modern Bharata is guiding even today.*

***Key words:*** *Swami Vivekananda – Modern Bharata, Indian Nationalism*

**Introduction:**

The Western Nations and the United States, in the beginning of the twentieth century, had gone under modernisation processes and were in the mid-period of modernisation. Bharata and Asian Countries were still in the shadow of the medieval ages. This was due to the fact that all these countries were under subjugation for centuries.

Swami Vivekananda lived in the middle of the nineteenth century and for a brief period of two years in the early part of the twentieth century.

The question that arises is that on what basis, Swami Vivekananda a traditional Hindu Monk, can be called as the 'Maker of Modern Bharata'.

To understand this one has to understand the concept of a modern nation and society and the process how a medieval nation transforms itself into a modern nation and society. Modernisation is

a process which has to start in the psyche of the society or nation. It is then, has to percolate into the thinking and attitudes of the society. This is a slow process. When the idea of modernisation optimally percolates in the society, it starts manifesting in various fields of the society. The concept of modernisation is abstract. However, its manifestations will be concrete. The change will be visible in all the fields of the society - cultural, social, political, economical, scientific and in literature. As an example one can take up the case of English literature, which has transformed itself from old, Shakespearian, romantic and to modern times. The cardinal point is, the concept of modernisation, has to be implanted in the psyche of the society.

Swami Vivekananda did this implantation in the psyche of the Bharatiya Society. This was a difficult task. The Bharatiya Society and the nation had developed a servile mind-set due to British subjugation. The nation had to be brought out of this mind-set of servitude and a longing for freedom from the colonial yoke to be fostered. Swami Vivekananda knew that the longing for freedom was one of the characteristics of modernisation. In 1894, in his letter to his disciple Sri Alasingha; Swamiji writes '*Liberty is the first condition of growth. Just as man must have liberty to think and speak, so he must have Liberty in food, dress and marriage and in every other thing, so long as he does not injure others*'<sup>1</sup>.

Swamiji's vision and mission for Bharata was clear and farsighted. He had a well defined vision for the transformation of Bharata into a modern nation. The first and foremost, mission of his was to 'Awaken Bharata'. The intellectual awakening brought by the Swamiji, after his triumphal return from west, in 1897, inspired the freedom movement. Scholars and thinkers have regarded him as the prophet and path finder of Bharatiya Nationalism. Historian R.G. Pradhan says '*Swami Vivekananda might well be called the father of Indian Nationalism; he largely created it, and embodied in his own use its higher and noblest elements*'<sup>2</sup>.

The evolution of Modern Bharata started along with the national struggle for freedom. It was almost a part and parcel of the movement. Swami Vivekananda not only envisaged a politically free and sovereign state, he also envisaged the transformation of Bharata into a modern nation.

Swamiji in his sojourn in the West had witnessed the effect of modernisation on many nations. He also knew the strength and faults of the Bharatiya society as he had toured the length and breadth of the land of Bharata. He wanted a transformation in the Bharatiya society (in particular Hindu society), so that, Bharata becomes a modern nation and once again regains her position as a '*Jagadguru*'. For the transformation, Swamiji's vision of modern Bharata was not on the model of modern nations of the West which solely relied upon the material prosperity. His concept of Modern Bharata is - *A Spiritually awakened, Socially Harmonious, properly educated great and economically strong nation.*

### ***Spiritually Awakened***

Swami Vivekananda had realised that religion is the pulse of Bharatiya nation. He observes '*In India, religious life forms the centre, the Keynote of whole music of national life; and if any nation attempts to throw off its national vitality ... that nation dies if it succeeds in its attempt*'<sup>3</sup>.

He wanted the Bharatiya Nation to be spiritually awakened which his according to him, the prerequisite for freedom and for building the modern nation. The spiritual lore he advocated was '*Practical Vedanta*' (*neo-vedanta*). Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa laid the foundation for the Neo-vedanta, based on the *Advaita Vedanta of Adi Shankara*. Swami Vivekananda expounded the basics of

*Neo-Vedanta* into a philosophy proper. '*Neo-Vedantism is a re-establishment and re-statement, re-construction and re-valuation, re-orientation and re-interpretation of Advaita Vedanta of Sankara with modern arguments, in modern language, suited to modern man adjusting itself all the modern challenges*'<sup>4</sup>.

*Neo-vedanta*, like *the vedanta*, is based on the principle of unity in the universe. Neo-Vedanta also conceives divinity as the spark of life and universe. It declares that man is the spark of the 'Divine spirit'-God. Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa expresses this as *Jiva is Shiva*. To serve Jiva is to worship Shiva. Swami Vivekananda made this concept of *Jiva is Shiva* as the basis of all the service programmes of Ramakrishna Mission. He gave a new vision and dimension to the concept of Service. He declared 'Look upon every man, woman and every one as God. You cannot help anyone, you can only serve'. He gave a new '*Mantra*' - '*Murkha Devo Bhava, Daridra Devo Bhava*'. This concept of service to mankind due to spiritual awakening will make the people, Swami Vivekananda felt raise to serve the poor and the down trodden.

The prophetic words of Swami Vivekananda are becoming true. A large number of institutions and individuals are working selflessly and devotedly for the upliftment of the poor and downtrodden in our country.

### ***Socially Harmonious***

Swami Vivekananda, by his study and wandering throughout the length and breadth of Bharata had come to the conclusion that the Bharatiya society in general and Hindu society in particular was highly disorganised.

He was also aware of the evils that have been generated by the degenerated cast system. The horror of *untouchability* pained him deeply.

In one of his discourses he thundered, '*No religion on earth preaches the dignity of humanity in such a lofty strain as Hinduism, and no religion on earth treads upon the necks of the poor and the low in such a fashion as Hinduism. Are we men? ... We do not touch them, we avoid their company! ... Wherein does our religion lie now? In 'Don't touchism' alone, and nowhere else! When, when, O' Lord, shall man be brother to man?*'<sup>5</sup>.

He was aware that these social evils of degenerated cast system and '*untouchability*' are to be eradicated to transform Bharata into a resurgent modern nation.

However, he also realised that even though the Bharatiya society is astonishingly diverse with many sects, traditions, languages and regional differences, there was a thread of unity among all these diversities. That thread is the spiritual heritage and cultural homogeneity. He wanted to awaken the society on the basis of this common thread of spirituality, which was also the philosophy of *Neo-vedantism*.

**According to Swamiji** - '*True nationalism in India can only be based on unity in religion. The one common ground that we have is our sacred tradition, our religion. That is the only common ground, and upon that we shall have to build*'.

*'The unity in religion, therefore, is absolutely necessary as the first condition of the future of India. There must be the recognition of one religion throughout the length and breadth of this land. What*

*do I mean by one religion? Not in the sense of one religion as held among the Christians, or the Mohammedans, or the Buddhists .... We know that our religion has certain common grounds, common to all our sects, however varying their conclusions may be, however different their claims may be. So there are certain common grounds; and within their limitations this religion of our admits of a marvellous variation, an infinite amount of liberty to think and live our own lives'*<sup>6</sup>.

*'It is not only true that the ideal of religion is the highest ideal in the case of India, it is the only possible means of work; work in any other line, without first strengthening this, would be disastrous. Therefore, the first plank in the making of a future India, the first step that is to be hewn out of that rock of ages, is the unification of religion'*.

*'National union in India must be a gathering up of its scattered spiritual forces. A Nation in India must be a union of those whose hearts beat to the same spiritual tune'*<sup>7</sup>.

This gathering of scattered spiritual forces of Hindu Dharma and turning them to beat to the same tune. Swami Vivekananda, founded the Ramakrishna Math in 1897. The purpose of the Math is to train young men to become Sanyasins to spread the message of *Neo-vedanta* to bring harmony among all religions and to serve the society. The motto of the Math is '*Atmano moksartham, Jagad hitaya cha*' - For one's own liberation, and for the welfare of the World'. The Math has set a model, by admitting people from all sects and traditions of Hindu religion, without any caste, language and other differences. It is significant to note that this aspect of unifying the various denominations of Hindu religion became a model to various socio-religious institutions. It is also a notable aspect that many social reformations for upliftment of untouchables and for social justice were started in various kingdoms visited by Swami Vivekananda.

The tune of social harmony set by the inspiring words of Swami Vivekananda, the selfless service being rendered by Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna mission are generating a response and resonance from the people of Bharata.

### **Properly Educated**

A nation to become intellectually great and a repository of knowledge and wisdom, its masses should be properly educated.

Swami Vivekananda while travelling through Europe and USA had observed that how proper education transforms the masses. He considered proper education was a panacea for all the age old afflictions responsible for the suffering of Bharata and to become intellectually great once again. He was also aware that the ancient Bharatiya system of education had been destroyed during the colonial rule and the education system introduced by the colonial rulers had a negative impact on the youth which continues even today. The very purpose of introduction of English education was of course to meet the needs of the colonial rulers, rather than needs of the Bharatiya people.

This was clearly stated by T.B. Macaulay (legal member of Viceroy's council). He stated '*we must at present do our best to form a class of persons, Indians in blood and colour but English in tastes, opinion, in morality and intellect'*<sup>8</sup>. The education system, fulfilled Macaulay's purpose. It started producing men who were Bharatiya in blood, but English in tastes and intellectual out-look. The English educated Bharatiya youths started accepting the propaganda that Bharata had no culture worth the name and to come up in the world, she has to adapt to the ways and means of European civilisation.

**In one of his lectures Swami Vivekananda observed, -**

*‘If we are to rise again, we shall have to do it ... by spreading education among the masses. Educate and raise the masses, and thus alone a nation is possible’.*

*‘The education which does not help the common mass of people to equip themselves for the struggle for life, which does not bring out strength of character, a spirit of philanthropy, and the courage of lion - is it worth the name? We want that education by which character is formed, strength of mind is increased, the intellect is expanded, and by which one can stand on one’s own feet’<sup>9</sup>.*

Swami Vivekananda during his travel in the West had visited many universities and centers of learning. He had a firsthand experience of the transformation that Science and technology bringing in the west. He was aware, that the dynamic forces of **Science and Technology** are shaping the modern world. He advocated the establishment of institutions of higher learning in **science and technology**. The internationally famous Indian Institution of Science, Bangalore is due to Swami Vivekananda’s advice to Jamsethe ji Tata and the Maharaja of Mysuru at that time.

Further his exposition to the exhibition – **‘World’s Columbian Exposition’** showcasing the achievements in science and technology made him to understand how essential science and technology for the development of any nation. He observed *‘It would be better if the people got a little technical education, so that they might find work and earn their bread, instead of dawdling about and crying for service’<sup>10</sup>.*

It is significant to note that the central, state governments and non-governmental organisations are giving priority to educate the masses from the days of independence. However, nationalistic education, which was very dear to the heart of Swami Vivekananda is still a far cry. There is an urgent need to address this compelling issue which has a bearing on the process of national regeneration.

Swami Vivekananda held that **empowerment of the women** as one of the perquisite for the rejuvenation of a nation. He observed in his speeches that *‘All nations have attained greatness by paying proper respect to women. That country and that nation which do not respect women have never become great, nor will ever be in future. If you do not raise the women, who are the living embodiment of the Divine Mother, don’t think that you have any other way to rise’<sup>11</sup>.*

Swami Vivekananda observed that one of the reasons for the downfall of Bharata was the neglect of her women. He advocated strongly for the cause of women education for the upliftment of women. In his view a true education *‘by which character is formed, strength of mind is increased, the intellect is expanded and by which one can stand on one’s feet’*, with such an education he said *‘women will solve their own problems’* ..... *‘Along with other things they should acquire the spirit of valour and heroism. In the present day it has become necessary for them also to learn self defence. See how grand was the queen of Jahansi’<sup>12</sup>.*

Swami Vivekananda, apart from disseminating his ideas on women empowerment, encouraged his beloved disciple Sister Nivedita to start a school exclusively for women. These efforts, finally, led to the establishment of schools and colleges for women all over the country. The idea of educating women, empowering them, implanted by Swami Vivekananda percolated into every walk of our national life. We are today, witnessing, the rise of outstanding woman as spiritual leaders, Scientists, Writers, Statesmen and Warriors. A tribute to the path finder of modern Bharata.

## ***Economically strong***

A nation gets rejuvenated and becomes economically strong only when the masses are freed from economic exploitation and poverty. He said '*I consider that the great national sin is the neglect of the masses, and that is one of the causes of our down fall. They pay for our education, they build our temples, but in return they get kicks. They are practically our slaves. If we want to regenerate India, we must work for them*'<sup>13</sup>.

He wanted the new rejuvenated Bharata rise uplifting the poor and the down trodden. He said '*Let new India arise, .... Let her arise out of the peasant's cottage, grasping the plough; out of the huts of fisherman, the cobbler and the sweeper. Let her emanate from the factory, from marts, and from the markets and from groves and forests, from hills and mountains*'<sup>14</sup>.

The vision and thoughts of Swami Vivekananda on the sufferings and upliftment of down trodden masses has inspired social thinkers, workers, political leaders and public to work for the upliftment of their suffering compatriots.

## ***Maker of Modern Bharata***

The life, vision and thoughts of Swami Vivekananda clearly establishes that he was the 'Turning Point' in the middle of the nineteenth century when Bharata was struggling for freedom from colonial rule and to become a modern nation. Swami Vivekananda played an epochal role in both these arduous endeavours. His vision and far-sight for the evolution of Modern Bharata is guiding even today.

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