

# Vivekananda's thoughts for modern india essay



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How is Vivekananda's life and teachings relevant to current generation youth? For more reasons than one, writing an essay on Vivekananda's teachings is a challenging task. One, Swami Vivekananda taught on both broad and very deep aspects (not restricted to India alone) encompassing Spiritualism, Universal values, Religion, Character building, Education, Spirit of Service and Social issues - it is not possible to cover all these in a small essay. Two, his teachings influenced contemporaries, inspired innumerable followers & started off movements all over India (continuing to do so even to the present day) and, as such, it is difficult to clearly say what he did teach and what he did not teach (Eg., some "Indian Nationalist" organizations that hold him to be their role model practice an intolerant and often violent form of Hindu culture.

Would Swami, had he been alive today, have supported such organizations?) - so, one needs to first of all be clear regarding what his core teachings are (In my essay, I have referred to [1]). Three, Vivekananda lived more than a 100 years ago (before the world wars) and a lot has changed with India and the world since then (India is now an independent nation with a Government elected by its own people and Public works departments to take care of all development works); so, some may argue that the concepts like Practical Vedanta, Karma Yoga, Bhakti etc. are "old-fashioned", "esoteric" or "mere rhetoric" and as such impractical or inefficient for progress of present-day India.

Four, one may ask "Vivekananda worked on Religious harmony, Education, Service and Social issues. But this is not new in India. At various times in the country's past before Vivekananda, Reformers, Philosophers and Saints have

attempted to bring about social improvement and even during the times Vivekananda lived, there were others like him. What new contribution did Vivekananda make? Moreover, the society today is much different, much better than it used to be. So how is Vivekananda relevant as of today?".

Finally, Swami is seen by many as a Godly person who taught and lived by the purest and strictest injunctions that ordinary people cannot follow; young people tend to think " Is it possible for me to live and work like Vivekananda? No, I cannot! I'll just light an Agarbatti stick & pay him my respects and then choose something easier that I can follow" - that is, unless young men are made to follow and practice Vivekananda's teachings, he will only remain an ideal and his vision for India will remain unfulfilled.

In this essay, I propose to take up the above points, one by one, in the following manner: I will begin by giving a summary of the main teachings of Vivekananda so that we are clear as to what he did teach. Next, I will present a brief sketch of his ideas and efforts in tackling the most important problems faced by the Indian masses during his times, namely Education, Poverty and Identity. Finally, in the last section, I will focus on three important areas that are important for development of present-day India - Education, Employment, and Infrastructure - and propose reforms for solving the problems based on Vivekananda's teachings. We will see if, how & in what way Swami Vivekananda is relevant today and how today's youth can find solutions to present-day problems in light of his teachings.

Gist of Vivekananda's teachings. For over twelve years from 1890-1902, amidst much hardship, suffering and personal humiliation, Swami

Vivekananda toured all over India and to several places abroad as itinerant monk, preaching and working on diverse problems. He played a major role in introducing India and her spiritual culture of Vedanta to the Western world and in reviving & refining Hinduism within India. His main teachings may be summarized in terms of his views on Education, Religion, Character building, Womanhood, Hinduism, Spirit of Service and National Integration.

A unique feature of Vivekananda's teachings is that they are, by and large, of universal nature, and hence, his speeches and sayings have been quoted by Albert Einstein, Nikola Tesla, Jawaharlal Nehru & many others. - Swami Vivekananda said of Education: " Education is the manifestation of perfection already in man". He said that education which does not enable a person to stand on his own feet, does not teach him self-confidence and self-respect, is useless. Education should be man-making, life giving and character-building. He also said that children should be given " positive education", i. e they should be encouraged to learn new things till they gain self-confidence and self-respect.

- Of Religion, Vivekananda said " To be good and to do good unto others - that is the essence of Religion". According to Swami Vivekananda, religion is the idea which raises the brute to man, and man unto God. Swami Vivekananda preached that Truth is the basis of all Religions and hence we must always practice tolerance towards other religions - be it Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity, Islam or other Religion.

- On Character. Since a country's future depends on its people, Vivekananda stressed on character building (he called it " man-making"). According to

Vivekananda, Jiva is Shiva (every man is potentially Divine). To become divine (or great), man must give up suspicion, jealousy, conceit and learn to work unitedly for the common good. Courage, faith (in oneself & in God), patience and steady work, according to Swami Vivekananda, is the way to success. He told that purity, patience and perseverance overcome all obstacles.

- Womanhood. Swami Vivekananda said that since the atman (soul) has neither sex nor caste, it is wrong to discriminate between sexes. He suggested not to think of people as men and women, but as human beings. According to Vivekananda, there is no chance for welfare in the world unless the condition of woman is improved. He felt that it was impossible to get back India's lost pride and honour unless the condition of women was improved. According to Vivekananda, the ideal of womanhood in India is motherhood and that Sita was the ideal of Indian womanhood.

- Hinduism. Vivekananda strived to give to Hinduism a clear-cut identity, both nationally and internationally. At the end of the 19th century, the Western world knew very little about India. The British masters and Christian missionaries had conveyed to them the picture of a barbaric, backward race of people practicing evil and inhuman Hindu customs. Moreover, the Hindus in India were practicing many different customs and traditions and were a loose confederation of many different sects. Swami approached the problem in two parts. Within India, he preached about the common bases of Hinduism, the common ground of all its different sects and brought about its overall unification. He also toured the Western countries in an effort to convey Hinduism's liberal and universal values to Westerners and raising his

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voice in its defence. He also worked among the masses fighting social evils and superstitions and trying to integrate the best elements of Western culture into Hindu culture.

- Regarding Spirit of Service, Vivekananda said " Do not stand on a high pedestal and take five cents in your hand and say, ' Here, my poor man' but be grateful that the poor man is there so that by making a gift to him, you are able to help yourself. It is not the receiver that is blessed, but it is the giver". Another saying: " Believe in the omnipotent power of love. Who cares for these tinsel puffs of name? Have you love? - You are omnipotent. Are you perfectly unselfish? If so, you are irresistible. It is character that pays everywhere. Give up jealousy and conceit. Learn to work unitedly for others. That is the great need of our country."

- National Integration. Swami said that in spite of innumerable linguistic, ethnic, historical and regional diversities; India has always had a strong sense of cultural unity and has been one nation. Swami strived to instil in Indians, a greater understanding of their country's profound spiritual heritage and pride in their past. He undertook tours to different parts of India and gave public speeches to rouse religious consciousness and to focus the attention of educated people on the plight of the downtrodden masses. He urged them to work for their emancipation, saying: " So long as the millions live in hunger and ignorance, I hold every man a traitor who, having been educated at their expense, pays not the least heed to them".