



Vivekananda Way

ISSUE 33

PULLOUT FOR REFERENCE



Series 5: Understanding India - through Swami Vivekananda's eyes

This series is a presentation of a set of lectures that Swami Vivekananda gave over three years, as he travelled from Colombo to Almora (January 1897- March 1901).

In Issues 22-27 & 29-32, we have covered his lectures at Colombo, Jaffna, Pamban, Rameshwaram, Ramnad, Paramakudi, and Shivaganga & Manamadura.

focus in this issue:

Talk at Madura

Swami Vivekananda begins his speech in Madura by paying a tribute to the Raja of Ramnad, who was one of the first persons to suggest that the Swami go to Chicago.

In this issue, we explore 6 key messages that Swami Vivekananda presents in this lecture:

1: The Law of Balancing, and India's destiny

Time and again, it has been the destiny of India to give spirituality to the world. Swami Vivekananda lists four examples...

Pre 600 BCE	600 BCE onwards	around 500 BCE	1800 CE
Before the rising of the Persian Empire	During the Persian Empire	During the ascendancy of the Greeks	During the ascendancy of the English

1. Whenever there has been a kneading together of different peoples into once race, either due to conquest or commercial supremacy, each nation has brought forth its own quota — either political, social, or spiritual.
2. India's contribution to the sum total of human knowledge has been spirituality, philosophy.



Wherever there is a thing really needed in one part of the world, the complement will find its way there and supply it with new life. This is true in the physical world as well as in the spiritual.



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2: Intermingling of ideas will benefit both India and the West

India and the West both are deluging each other with their ideas



1. Western ideas of organization and external civilization are entering into the mind's of the Indian people. Similarly, Indian philosophy and spirituality is deluging the world. Neither can we resist it, nor can they.
2. This inter-mingling of ideas will benefit both. A little spiritualization will be good for the West, and a little materialization will be good for us.

It is not that we ought to learn everything from the West, or that they have to learn everything from us, but each will have to supply and hand down to future generations what it has for the future accomplishment of that dream of ages — the harmony of nations, an ideal world.



Swami Vivekananda muses: Will there ever be an ideal world?



Whether that ideal world will ever come I do not know, whether that social perfection will ever be reached I have my own doubts; whether it comes or not, each one of us will have to work for the idea as if it will come tomorrow, and as if it only depends on his work, and his alone. Each one of us will have to believe that every one else in the world has done his work, and the only work remaining to be done to make the world perfect has to be done by himself. This is the responsibility we have to take upon ourselves.

3: The three big challenges ahead of India due to the revival of religion

The first challenge that Swami Vivekananda points out to is that a revival of religion can bring with it, both glory and fanaticism.

1. In fact, he says that sometimes this fanaticism can go to such an extreme that it goes way beyond the power of those who started it.
2. This kind of fanaticism is one of the real dangers which we have to guard against at all times.

... in India there is a tremendous revival of religion. There is danger ahead as well as glory; for revival sometimes breeds fanaticism



We have to find our way between the Scylla of old superstitious orthodoxy and the Charybdis of materialism – of Europeanism, of soullessness, of the so-called reform – which has penetrated to the foundation of Western progress. These two



have to be taken care of.

The second challenge that Swami Vivekananda points out is the reconciliation between orthodoxy and materialism.

He shows us how imitating the West is not the answer:

1. Firstly, from a psychological point of view, the impact of becoming pure materialists will be that we won't have any life in us anymore – as it will make us lose our faith in ourselves.
2. Secondly, from a historical point of view, even if we were to become Western today, we cannot undo the flow of our history through the ages, which has resulted in a natural growth of our civilization.
3. And, thirdly, from a cultural point of view, even if modifying our history was possible, we would not still be able to become Europeanised. Just like the west cannot throw away its centuries old culture, we too cannot throw away millennia of our culture overnight.

The third challenge that Swami Vivekananda points out is the existence of infinite variety of religious customs all over India.

He presents 4 key arguments as to why this challenge exists:

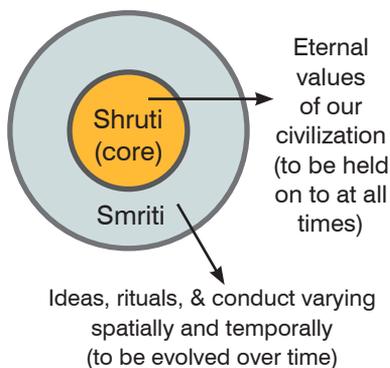
1. Many of our local customs are contradictory, i.e. what is considered as within the fold of religion in one part of the country, is considered completely unacceptable in another part.
2. People are deeply attached to their local customs and unwilling to change.
3. A bigger challenge is that each of our Smritis presents a different Aachara of the age (i.e. practices), and hence these often end up conflicting one another.
4. The greatest mistake we make is to always think that local customs & practices are the essence of our religion.

This you have always to remember that because a little social custom is going to be changed you are not going to lose your religion, not at all.



4: The Solution: hold on to the essentials and allow customs & laws to evolve

THE SHRUTI-SMRITI MODEL



There are two sorts of truth.. one that is based upon the eternal nature of man.. the other, with local circumstances, environments of the time, social institutions of the period, and so forth. The first class of truths is chiefly embodied in our Vedas, our scriptures; the second in the Smritis, the Puranas. etc. ...eternal truths, being based upon the nature of man, will never change so long as man lives; they are for all times, omnipresent, universal virtues. But the Smritis speak generally of local circumstances, of duties arising from different environments, and they change in the course of time.



5. What is the right attitude to religion in the Indian context?

The right attitude is necessary for India, if we are to navigate and reconcile modern materialism and old orthodoxy. Swami Vivekananda outlines such an attitude.

Swami Vivekananda asks us to combine liberal mindedness with the intensity of devotion to what we hold dear.

He lays down how to create our own course for this:

1. We need to develop the breadth and the depth to become inclusive of all (not follow a path of exclusion).
2. We need become as progressive as any nation, but at the same time deeply respect the core of our values & philosophy.
3. We cannot revile any existing customs, as we must remember that they were needed for the survival of our race. So let us remove the older smritis not with a curse, but with a blessing.

I want the intensity of the fanatic plus the extensity of the materialist. Deep as the ocean, broad as the infinite skies, that is the sort of heart we want.



6: The Rishi Ideal: an ideal for each one of us to become a world mover

Swami Vivekananda then proposes the Rishi Ideal:

1. The leaders of our society have been neither kings nor generals — but Rishis.
2. Who is a Rishi? The Rishi as he is called in the Upanishads is not an ordinary person, but a mantra-drashtâ — seer of knowledge.
3. Rishihood means actualisation (not book learning, nor argumentation, not speculation, not talking — but actual realization of truths.
4. Rishis do not belong to any caste.
5. Every one of us will be called upon to become rishis. We must have faith in ourselves.
6. When we become rishis, each one of us will be a world-moving giant.

...every one of us will be called upon to become Rishis; and we must have faith in ourselves; we must become world-movers, for everything is in us.

We must see Religion face to face, experience it, and thus solve our doubts about it; and then standing up in the glorious light of Rishihood each one of us will be a giant; and every word falling from our lips will carry behind it that infinite sanction of security; and before us evil will vanish by itself without the necessity of cursing any one, without the necessity of abusing any one, without the necessity of fighting any one in the world.

May the Lord help us, each one of us here, to realise the Rishihood for our own salvation and for that of others!



If you have any questions on this lecture, do post your queries on www.vivekanandaway.org.

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