



# Vivekananda Way

ISSUE 34

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 & 29-33, we have covered his lectures at Colombo, Jaffna, Pamban, Rameshwaram, Ramnad, Paramakudi, Shivaganga & Manamadura, and Madura.

### focus in this issue:

## Mission of the Vedanta - 2

This is part 2 of the lecture Mission of the Vedanta. In the previous issue, we covered the first part of the lecture, where we explored the Indian view of religion and the power of Vedanta as a universal religion. In this issue, we explore the role of Vedanta in awakening India.

### 1.0 Why is the doctrine of Advaita Vedanta necessary for India in its present stage?

1. Swami Vivekananda tells us that dualistic theories of worship and religion are valuable, but they have their limitations. They have made us soft. He points out that now is not the time for weeping. Rather, what our country needs are 'nerves of iron and muscles of steel'. And it is Advaita that build this strength and faith in ourselves.
2. He asks us to reflect on why is it that we 330 million people could be ruled by a handful of foreigners for several centuries? *The answer: because they had faith in themselves and we had not.*
3. Therefore, Swami Vivekananda's answer is that it is necessary to preach the Advaita aspect of Vedanta to one and all – to rouse their hearts and show them the glory of their own soul.
4. Swami Vivekananda also demonstrates a reconciliation between the advaitic system, dualism and qualified monism, by pointing out that every system in India upholds the doctrine that divinity resides in all beings – and purity, strength, perfection are already present in the soul. The difference only lies in the means of discovering this, i.e. some systems believe that perfection becomes contracted or expanded, but yet it is there at all times. While, according to Advaita, it neither contracts nor expands, it becomes hidden and uncovered now and again.



**“Have faith in yourselves, and stand up on that faith and be strong; that is what we need.**

**Why is it that we three hundred and thirty millions of people have been ruled for the last one thousand years by any and every handful of foreigners who chose to walk over our prostrate bodies? Because they had faith in themselves and we had not.**

**We have lost faith in ourselves. Therefore to preach the Advaita aspect of the Vedanta is necessary to rouse up the hearts of men, to show them the glory of their souls.**

**It is, therefore, that I preach this Advaita; and I do so not as a sectarian, but upon universal and widely acceptable grounds.**

**>Continue overleaf**

## 2.0 What should be our approach for building faith and a sense of equality across the nation?

*The Starting Point: Let us introspect and take responsibility for having created the current situation*

1. Swami Vivekananda asks us to introspect and reflect on who is responsible for our misery and degradation for all these years – we ourselves are responsible, not the British, not any other foreigner. Why?
2. Firstly, our aristocratic ancestors tormented the common masses of our country and exploited them to an extent that our poor masses nearly forgot they were human beings! They were made to believe that they were destined to be slaves, “as hewers of wood and drawers of water”, i.e. doing menial work.
3. Secondly, even in modern times, most of us shrink from the duty of helping these downtrodden people. We have become too selfish.
4. Moreover, we use demoniacal and brutal arguments such as hereditary transmission, which are the 'imported gibberish from the Western world', to continue our tyranny over the poor.



**If the Brahmin is born clever, he can educate himself without help. If the others are not born clever, let them have all the teaching and the teachers they want. This is justice and reason as I understand it. Our poor people, these downtrodden masses of India, therefore, require to hear and to know what they really are.**

*The Interventional Strategy: Affirm all, but first affirm those who need it most*



**Ay, let every man and woman and child, without respect of caste or birth, weakness or strength, hear and learn that behind the strong and the weak, behind the high and the low, behind every one, there is that Infinite Soul, assuring the infinite possibility and the infinite capacity of all to become great and good.**

1. Swami Vivekananda tells us – 'Give to the weak, for there all the gift is needed'.
2. Those who are privileged don't need help. Rather, justice and reason lies in giving to those who lack privilege.
3. Our poor people, these downtrodden masses of India, therefore, require to hear and to know what they really are.

*The Goal: Rouse the sleeping soul within each person*

1. Swami Vivekananda tells us that the great Vedantic Ideal of sameness and omnipresence of the Supreme Soul is to be preached to all.
2. Each person has to become aware of their own infinite possibility and their equality with everyone else on this dimension.

### **A challenge we will have to solve**

In order to do this, we will need to solve the challenge of making Vedanta applicationizable to daily life. People will have to be given a practical way by which they can reach this ideal.



**... Thus there is a great opening for the Vedanta to do beneficent work both here and elsewhere. This wonderful idea of the sameness and omnipresence of the Supreme Soul has to be preached for the amelioration and elevation of the human race here as elsewhere.**

### 3.0 How do we meaningfully address the vexed challenge of caste in India? (*Which can come in the way of building faith and a sense of sameness in our people*)

To begin with, India has a spiritual ideal, not a material ideal.

#### THE IDEAL OF OUR RACE



**The ideal man of our ancestors was the Brahmin. ...Our ideal is the Brahmin**

**of spiritual culture and renunciation. By the Brahmin ideal what do I mean? I mean the ideal Brahmin-ness in which worldliness is altogether absent and true wisdom is abundantly present. That is the ideal of the Hindu race.**

The ideal man is a Brahmin, not by birth, but by the life that was led.

Swami Vivekananda uses the term 'Brahmin' differently from the way we use it. He uses it, not as a caste, but as an ideal of a person in whom 'worldliness is altogether absent and true wisdom is abundantly present'. The ideal man of our ancestors was the Brahmin of spiritual culture and renunciation – a person who has killed all selfishness and who lives and works to acquire and propagate wisdom and the power of love.

#### **Caste is a social framework designed for the steady evolution of society**

1. Caste, for Swami Vivekananda, is an institution of social hierarchy. It is about creating a societal framework which will allow steady development of all humanity towards the realization of a greater ideal.
2. Swami Vivekananda points out that our ancient law-givers were also caste-breakers, but not in the way we see it today. Rather they broke caste 'inside-out' by exalting people to rise up towards the highest ideal and thereby break the bondages that are caging them.

#### **The solution to the caste problem**

1. The real solution to the caste problem, is neither degrading those who are high up, nor forcing people to trespass their natural limits. Thus, momentary social reform wherein people randomly break caste by eating and drinking together or inter-marrying is not going to solve the problem in any sustainable way.
2. The solution comes when each of us fulfills the dictates of our Vedantic religion – i.e. we work steadily, rising step-by-step to a spiritual ideal.
3. Thus, our ideal of caste is such that it enables all humanity to slowly and gently rise towards the realisation of that great ideal of the spiritual man who is non-resisting, calm, steady, worshipful, pure, and meditative. This ideal is conducive to a harmonious society.



**Therefore our solution of the caste question is not degrading those who are already high up, is not running amuck through food and drink, is not jumping out of our own limits in order to have more enjoyment, but it comes by every one of us, fulfilling the dictates of our Vedantic religion, by our attaining spirituality, and by our becoming the ideal Brahmin.**



**The command is the same to you all, that you must make progress without stopping, and that from the highest man to the lowest Pariah, every one in this country has to try and become the ideal Brahmin. This Vedantic idea is applicable not only here but over the whole world.**

4.0

## How should proceed on the task of building inner faith and a sense of sameness in this nation?



1] Begin with sympathy, not by vilifying and abusing

I must again draw your attention to the fact that cursing and vilifying and abusing do not and cannot produce anything good. They have been tried for years and years, and no valuable result has been obtained. Good results can be produced only through love, through sympathy.

2] Recognize that this is “our ship” which we all must save

...this ship of our nation, O Hindus, has been usefully plying here for ages. Today, perhaps, it has sprung a leak; today, perhaps, it has become a little worn out. And if such is the case, it behoves you and me to try our best to stop the leak and holes. Let us tell our countrymen of the danger, let them awake and help us.



3] Let us sink or swim together in this work of saving the national ship

Great has been our nation's work in the past; and if we cannot do greater things in the future, let us have this consolation that we can sink and die together in peace.



4] Have faith that the Spirit will triumph

Ay, the more I compare notes, the more I love you, my fellow-countrymen; you are good and pure and gentle. You have been always tyrannised over, and such is the irony of this material world of Mâyâ. Never mind that; the Spirit will triumph in the long run.



5] Remember that our institutions, though flawed, have noble aims and purposes at their very core

Have no word of condemnation even for the most superstitious and the most irrational of its institutions, for they also must have served some good in the past. Remember always that there is not in the world any other country whose institutions are really better in their aims and objects than the institutions of this land.

...I have seen castes in almost every country in the world, but nowhere is their plan and purpose so glorious as here. If caste is thus unavoidable, I would rather have a caste of purity and culture and self-sacrifice, than a caste of dollars.



6] Take the whole responsibility on your shoulder and carry the Light of Vedanta to all

Close your lips and let your hearts open. Work out the salvation of this land and of the whole world, each of you thinking that the entire burden is on your shoulders. Carry the light and the life of the Vedanta to every door, and rouse up the divinity that is hidden within every soul.”



If you have any questions on this lecture, do post your queries on [www.vivekanandaway.org](http://www.vivekanandaway.org).

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