

Swami Vivekananda's Vision of Future Society and Its Foundation in Indian Knowledge Traditions

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Abstract

The transformational wisdom of Vedanta and yoga was introduced to the Western world by Swami Vivekananda, a visionary ambassador of Indian philosophy who drew upon his deep spiritual and philosophical history. His profound insights had an enduring impression on modern thought. His powerful belief that each person possesses a dormant divine potential that is just waiting to be awakened and developed in order to change human life into a manifestation of its highest, most luminous nature forms the foundation of his spiritual teachings.

Swami Vivekananda's vision regarding the nation's future was that the Indian people should regain their original dignity. He envisioned that India should attain prosperity and progress through material advancement while sustaining its original heritage of spiritual sense. A close study of Swami Vivekananda's vision would open a window to witness the Indian native culture which has been inextricably connected with spiritualism. The best Indian spiritual principles are found in Vedanta. Swami Vivekananda upheld the pursuit of human excellence and a spiritual culture through integration of Vedantic principles in day-to-day life. He preached that concepts like Vedanta, Advaita, Spirituality and Civilization are abstract unless they are implemented into daily life.

The study emphasizes the applicability of Vivekananda's Vision of globalization and building a 'Good' and knowledge-centered society especially in the work, career, and educational landscape in contemporary relevance and Vivekananda's thought is contextualized within India's rich knowledge traditions.

Key Words

Vedanta, Advaita, globalization, knowledge-centered society, Indian Knowledge Traditions

1. Introduction

If one were to ask whether the trajectory of India as a civilization or nation is in accordance with Swami Vivekananda's vision, it would be difficult to respond with clarity on the nature of the future society or culture, except pick up a thumbnail sketch of what he envisioned. He had said: *I do not see into the future: nor do I care to see. But one vision I see clear as life before me: that the ancient Mother has awakened once more, sitting on Her throne rejuvenated, more glorious than ever.* These are prophetic words whose meaning only time would unfold. Yet when we examine this trajectory the broad trends or forces shaping India in the 21st century. The task is not easy and involves an understanding of the interwoven processes, which constitute the fabric of societal changes taking place today. This article presents a few remarks or simplified models of the complex forces that are changing Indian society in this century.

2. Discussion of Major Changes in society

We can identify three important changes or major shifts in our society whose impact we can clearly see in the Indian context. They are:

Synthesis between the imperatives of globalization and reconciling it with civilizational continuity and tradition

There have always been in India's long history, attempts to preserve local traditions and heritage as markers to a unique identity of both individuals and social groups. Advances in communication technology have facilitated this by giving birth to knowledge exchange through online social groups". As a result, local customs and identity have become more popular as a safeguard against the swift and faceless globalization that is taking place.

But is a defensive response a shallow imitation of an outmoded symbology? Swami discusses these aspects of Indian life, from a historical perspective, in his thought-provoking articles, '*Modern India*' and '*The East and the West*', which were translated into English from his Bengal contributions to the journal *Udbodhan* in 1899. Swamiji predicted the globalization of institutions and organizations.

While clearly defining the national ideals of India as 'Renunciation and Service', he had given his futuristic vision of the emerging global culture based on harmony of nations and peoples of the world, in 1897, long before the League of Nations or U.N came into existence: *International organizations, international combinations, international laws are the cry of the day. That shows the solidarity, he said while pointing out that, it is becoming everyday clearer that the solution of any problem can never be attained on racial, or national, or narrow grounds. Every idea has to become broad till it covers the whole of this world, every aspiration must go on increasing till it has engulfed the whole of humanity, the whole of life, within its scope.*

Swamiji spoke of an India that had to play a vital role in the march of humanity towards a truly universal or global society. According to him, each nation is, as it were, a living entity with a soul, with a distinct mission, and a destiny to fulfil. India's soul lies in her spirituality, and her world mission is to uphold spirituality as her national ideal and spread it all over the globe. He envisioned a future India as a spiritually enlightened nation, firmly standing on her feet as an economically prosperous, socially harmonious, and scientifically and technically advanced nation in harmony with the rest of the world.

A shift from dry intellectualism and rigid ritualism to building a 'Good Society' based on a shared set of values derived from espoused ideals

The UNESCO report: 'Learning: The Treasure Within', says that the 'life-long learning for the 21st century' concept rests on four pillars, 'Learning to know', 'Learning to do', 'Learning to live together', and 'Learning to be'. It seems to echo the ancient Indian scheme of integral education of which Swamiji was the living embodiment. In his book Raja Yoga, he uses the following phrases to describe the transformative power of ideas: *Take up one idea. Make that one idea your life think of it, dream of it, live on that idea. Let the brain, muscles, nerves, every part of your body, be full of that idea, and just leave every other idea alone. This is the way to success, and this is the way great spiritual giants are produced.* In his famous lecture on Practical Vedanta, delivered in London on 10 November 1896, Swamiji further says: *Fill yourselves with the idea; whatever you do, think well on it. All your actions will be magnified, transformed, deified, by the very power of the thought. If matter is powerful, thought is omnipotent. Bring this thought to bear upon your life, fill yourselves with the thought of your almightiness, your majesty, and your glory.*

Building a knowledge-centered society especially in the work, career, and educational landscape

An education system, which can synthesize the best of modern educational technology, developed by an emerging knowledge-centred society with the best of Indian spiritual tradition and culture, will surely help in the rejuvenation of India, by stemming the forces of cultural alienation tending to destroy our nation. Education for mere 'job-seeking' or 'making a living' seems to be the watchword today, and mere economic benefits are the focus of youth in pursuit of degrees in an 'examination system'. This destroys the culture of ingenuity and innovation. 'Learning by discovery' rather than the prevailing 'learning by rote method' will help foster creativity and a sense of self-esteem in the individual. Swamiji's philosophy of education, which centres on total personality development of the individual, can be leveraged to usher in all-round national growth. He emphasized that the goal of all education should be 'to make man grow' to his full potential. He once said: *We want to become harmonious beings. with the psychical, spiritual, intellectual, and working (active) sides of our nature equally developed. Nations and individuals typify one of these sides or types and cannot understand more than that one...The ideal is really that we should become many-sided.* This kind of education combining the best elements drawn from various cultures all over the world could help to usher in a truly globalized society in the 21st century.

- **Foundations in Indian Knowledge Tradition**

Swami Vivekananda's vision of globalization, a good society was deeply rooted in the Indian knowledge tradition—drawing from Vedanta, the Bhagavad Gita, the Upanishads, and the broader ethos of Sanatana Dharma, as—

- **Vedantic Philosophy**

Vivekananda was a proponent of *Advaita Vedanta*, which teaches the *oneness of existence* — *Tat Tvam Asi* (Thou art That). Inspired by the idea of **Brahman** (universal consciousness), he saw all beings as inherently equal and divine. This philosophy promotes the idea that all beings are interconnected, laying a spiritual foundation for globalization.

- **Inclusivity and Pluralism**

Indian traditions celebrate *anekantavada* (many-sidedness of truth), found in Jainism, and *sarva dharma sambhava* (equal respect to all religions). These ideas support a multicultural global society.

- **Yoga and Self-realization**

He introduced *Raja Yoga* and *Jnana Yoga* to the West, not just as practices, but as pathways to self-understanding and inner peace. These practices are tools for individual transformation, which in turn fosters global harmony.

- **Dharmic Values**

Concepts like *dharma* (righteous duty), *ahimsa* (non-violence), and *seva* (selfless service) underpin social responsibility — key in a globalized world. His sense of duty (Dharma), compassion (Karuna), and righteous action were deeply influenced by ancient Indian texts and traditions.

- **Upanishads & Gita**

The *Upanishadic message* of “Aham Brahmasmi” (I am Brahman) and the *Bhagavad Gita’s call to action* (Nishkama Karma) were central. He blended *detached action* with *selfless service*, forming a foundation for social work driven by inner conviction.

- **Guru-Shishya Parampara**

His relationship with Sri Ramakrishna reflects the traditional Indian mode of knowledge transmission through lived experience, intuition, and realization.

Swami Vivekananda’s vision of a knowledge-centered society is also rooted deeply in India’s ancient spiritual and philosophical traditions, and he envisioned its transformation through modern education, ethical work, and holistic career development, as—

- **Knowledge as the Foundation of Society**

Vivekananda emphasized knowledge not merely as information, but as self-realization and inner awakening. He believed true education should draw out the divinity within and harmonize body, mind, and soul. In a knowledge-centered society, character, moral strength, and self-confidence are as crucial as technical expertise.

- **Educational Landscape: Ancient Roots, Modern Mission**

Inspired by the Gurukul system, where learning was holistic—covering spiritual wisdom, practical skills, and moral values. Stressed *Jnana* (knowledge), *Bhakti* (devotion), *Karma* (action), and *Raja* (meditation) as integrated paths to self-development. He called for *man-making education*, which strengthens both *intellect and character*. Advocated for

science and rational inquiry to go hand-in-hand with *spiritual education*. Education should not be limited to textbooks but include *life skills, ethics, and service*.

“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.”

- **Career and Work Ethic: Karma Yoga in Action**

Work was seen not just as a livelihood, but as a form of worship—a path to self-realization (Karma Yoga). He encouraged people to engage in selfless service (*seva*), particularly towards the upliftment of the poor and marginalized. Urged professionals to align their careers with dharma (righteousness) and nation-building.

- **Knowledge for National and Global Progress**

Wanted India to regain its past glory by reviving spiritual strength and combining it with Western science and technology, dreamed of an India where education and work would empower individuals to rise above caste, poverty, and ignorance and saw youth as the torchbearers of this new society—fearless, ethical, and enlightened.

- **Integration of Indian Knowledge Tradition in Modern Systems**

Yoga, Vedanta, and Upanishadic philosophy were central to his idea of education and personal growth. Encouraged teaching Sanskrit, Indian philosophy, ethics, and history to build a national identity rooted in pride and awareness. Urged reform in curriculum to include value-based education, drawn from texts like the Bhagavad Gita, Vedas, and Upanishads.

4. Contemporary Relevance

Swami Vivekananda's vision offers profound insights into harmonizing globalization with cultural continuity, fostering a values-driven society, and cultivating a knowledge-centric educational and professional landscape. His teachings remain remarkably pertinent in addressing contemporary challenges.

- **Synthesis of Globalization with Civilizational Continuity**

Vivekananda envisioned globalization not as a threat to cultural identities but as an opportunity for mutual enrichment. He advocated for embracing global advancements while preserving the essence of one's own traditions. By reinterpreting ancient Indian values through the lens of Vedanta philosophy, he demonstrated how to integrate traditional wisdom with modern progress.

- **Transition from Intellectualism and Ritualism to a 'Good Society'**

Challenging mere ritualistic practices and abstract intellectualism, Vivekananda emphasized the practical application of spiritual principles. He introduced the concept of "Shiva Jnane Jiva Seva"—serving humanity as an expression of divine service. This approach promotes a society grounded in compassion, unity, and shared values, transcending social and religious divisions.

- **Building a Knowledge-Centered Society**

Vivekananda's educational philosophy centered on the holistic development of individuals. He believed education should awaken the inherent potential within each person, fostering self-confidence, character, and the ability to contribute meaningfully to society. This perspective aligns with the modern emphasis on lifelong learning and personal growth in educational and professional settings.

So we find, in today's interconnected world, Vivekananda's vision serves as a guiding framework for encouraging societies to assimilate global innovations without losing cultural identities, Promoting values such as empathy, integrity, and social responsibility as the bedrock of societal development and advocating for education systems that prioritize character building and the realization of individual potential over rote learning.

By embracing these principles, societies can navigate the complexities of globalization while maintaining cultural integrity and fostering inclusive growth.

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