



The tensions of identity and the promise of cohesion: Revisiting Vivekananda in contemporary India

Md. Ajmal Hoque, Neelava Ghoshal

Department of Political Science, Rabindra Bharati University, West Bengal, India

Abstract

Contemporary India is currently navigating a complex sociological landscape defined by the rise of identity politics a phenomenon where political and social mobilization increasingly centers on specific caste, religious, and regional affiliations. While these movements have been instrumental in empowering historically marginalized groups, data from the mid-2020s suggests a growing side effect increased social fragmentation and a "zero-sum" approach to resource allocation that threatens national stability. This research article explores these tensions and proposes a restorative framework by revisiting the philosophy of Swami Vivekananda.

The study argues that Vivekananda's Practical Vedanta offers a sophisticated alternative to exclusionary identity narratives. By shifting the focus from external social labels to the inherent "divinity within all," Vivekananda provides a spiritual basis for social cohesion that does not require the erasure of individual heritage. His concept of "Universal Religion" promotes a model of "acceptance" rather than mere "tolerance," suggesting that diverse identities are not contradictory but are various expressions of a single national fabric (Unity in Diversity).

Through a qualitative analysis of his works, lectures and their application to current demographic trends, the paper concludes that Vivekananda's "Man-making" education is essential for modern India. It serves as a psychological bridge, allowing citizens to maintain their unique cultural identities while fostering a deep-rooted commitment to national integration.

Keywords: Identity politics, social cohesion, Swami Vivekananda, Practical Vedanta, national integration

Introduction

The way under which the contemporary Indian system of the political fabric can be observed, it is mainly divergently becoming the hotspots of the struggle and instability caused due to the notion of the caste, class, sex, religion and ethnicity of the population. The main fathoming of this observation can be seen with the conviction of the caste, class, ethnicity, race and the gender identity, which plays a role in giving birth to the differences and disunity among the people, of the same nation. Over the years, this insatiable differences have rather increased at a certain alarming rate. These are not able to respond adequately to the challenges posed by economic development and social change; the growing political awakening among the people and their aroused and rising expectations, the refusal of the oppressed and the disadvantaged to accept their social condition, and the growing class and caste conflict among contending social groups (Chandra *et al.* 2013. p. 656) thus corresponding to the social order being dissected through the bulks of the impotencies and the vain use of the identity, targeted as a form of the differences.

Now this form of the difference has also been known to devalue the true meaning of the unity, which is meant through the idea of the nationalism. This is strangled with the events of the disputes and the harm which are targeted over to the posited population. Now in this form of the disarray and the turmoil, the idea and the philosophy of Swami Vivekananda stands as the most effective and the predominant in form of uniting and dissolving the issues of difference.

The ideas and the very intellectual thinking of the great sage, Vivekananda, explores the values and the premise of the universality and oneness among the individual- with a

bridge to resolve the indifferences among the socially constructed identity. The best way to describe his efforts is mainly through an idea often movingly expressed through tears and toil, a genuine empathy for the poor and the humble and, above all, by drawing attention to the underlying unity of human life and the common human predicament. (Sen, 2011. p. 94) ^[7] Certainly it requires a brief attention to the idea, with which Vivekananda has been portrayed, not merely as a religious leader, monk, but rather as a social reformer, who have dedicated his life for the betterment of the Indian social structure and the orientation of the unity of her diversity, with much careful and active approach.

Why revisiting swami vivekananda matters?

The whole idea of Swami Vivekananda, matters the most, as chiefly due to his ideas of the universalism, spiritual waves of nationalism, and social harmony among the people, without heeding to the notion of their social identity, which is based on the religion, sex, caste, and their race. The strongly humanistic message in his writings and speeches is not unprecedented in the Indian tradition and Vivekananda himself admitted to modelling his ethical activism on the lines of the Buddha. Likewise, the Vedantic message he tried disseminating in India and the West has deep philosophical roots in Sankara and other pre-modern thinkers (Sen, 2011. p. 102) ^[7] deepening his view and the development of an amalgamation in the viewpoint of a necessarily good society, where the humans are unified through their intellect, passion towards the humanity, and most of all the idea of oneness, without any form of the discrimination and any conviction of the differentiation. The way in which Vivekananda has fabricated his theory and thinking is not solely, in a narrow purpose, rather in a very

broader manner- where he himself points out to the good teachings and the morality in the thinking of the several backgrounds.

For him, the narrowness of the religious or the social construct doesn't work, rather, it is mainly the universality of the knowledge and the *human good* which holistically welfares the whole of the society. Not only so, it also dedicates how the idea of the unity solves the fractures of the unity among the men, and leads them *towards a state of better living*.

Vivekananda argues for the possibility of a universal religion which may help in bringing about social peace and harmony. He earnestly stressed on minimizing the apparent religious difference as it may pause as a threat to humanity, lead to hatred, indiscriminate killings and violence. (Haloi (BIPIN CHANDRA, 2013)^[2], 2019. p. 102).

The Contemporary Identity Politics: Leaning Towards the Communitarian Rigidity

The major preaching for Vivekananda, in terms of the humanism and the efforts of the universalism, which found itself in the idea of the man as the man itself. It doesn't necessarily projects the mode of the differences in the idea of the common man, and on the manner in which every one is expected to be a form of consciousness. Now when trying to navigate the idea of the contemporary politics, it is mainly casted as the fulfilment of the communal politics, and moreover, in the modes of the communal identity, which in itself is born from the deep façade of the orthodoxal practices of the segregation of the people and the community form one another. Over the last decade, this punctured form of the political narration has rather increased with the provision of the distinction among the people, on the basis of the caste and the class.

But the conception of Vivekananda stands as totally different as the world view, which he projects, it goes as He claimed that all faiths pursue the same truth and ultimately lead to the same divine objective, and he envisioned a religion that is global and transcends sectarian bounds (Dewangan and Dewangan, 2022. p. 42) and this stands as the total difference in which the view of the narration of the community should stands as. Perhaps, the way in which the idea of the unity should focus or steer towards, and this is not solely a vacant word, rather supported by his convictions and the theorisation of his own life.

The civilizational nationalism: anti- thesis to the narrow communitarian and nationalistic attitude

The idea behind the conception of the nation as per Vivekananda is not mainly in the line of the western notion, but rather in the conception of the Vedanta Philosophy, which he formed through the rigorous practice of the Indian philosophical trends. This is also seen with the way in which the nationalism is inclusive and humane, focusing on the spiritual and moral upliftment of society. He envisioned a future India with a harmonious blend of different cultures and religions. (Singh, 2023. p. 216)^[8] This notion of the Indian society, doesn't compromise or is back drawn through the struggle of oddities of the caste culture, or religious background rather boasts of the unity, which is framed through the idea of the human root and the base of the single society. this can also be seen in the notion of the Yoga philosophy, which yet again bores itself to be the unison of the human empathy, and the consciousness of the individual.

The idea of the nationalism, as per the norms of the Western norm, is much more alienating, as it deeply creates a form of the unison or a unique identity, which is then bore down by all of the population. But this is deeply critiqued by him, as he lays the foundation of the nationalism as a recognition that difference is not a threat but an opportunity for collective growth toward peace and universal wisdom (Widyastuti *et al.*, 2025. p. 46) in which the directive is based on the recognition of the different thought, but not in the terms for differentiation, rather as the position of the acceptance.

Critique of the Caste Heirarchy

The notion of the dispute in the identity mainly arises out of the prevalent caste hierarchy, which is practised till date in the Indian social system. This is not effectively the notion of the extreme source of the untouchability or through the active segregation of the living quarters, but can be passively seen in the idea of the caste politics, which is inherently being practised through the selective employment, or through the marriage separated through the particular caste or the individual group. This is also seen in the nomenclature, that the idea of the great reformer was not solely based on the idea of the Hinduism, but rather tried to incorporate his own view and enhance, and in places, correct the inherent flaws in the belief systems, and the practices of the Hinduism.

Being a staunch believer of universalism, Vivekananda mainly fostered a very bitter view against the dominating caste system, for which he prefers that there should be no difference among the man due to their birth. So he argued against casteism which helps in growing the problem of untouchability. He also pointed out the way of its eradication which is love (Haloi, 2019. p.100) and this is solely to be overcome through the means of the fraternal feeling and fostering a spirit of the unison. This is not indeed to be seen that he was against the conventional caste system.

Rather the thinking and the ideological base for Vivekananda's thinking is based on the Vedanta philosophy, which takes on side of a more practising form of the Hinduism, which believes in the integral form of serving the other people, and also requiring to submit themselves and their will for the benefit of the unison, and not in some of the mere discrimination among them.

The Practice of Humanism

The idea of the identity politics has largely been related with the idea of the men being discriminated, merely on the basis of their race and with the aspect of their own social identity. The occurrences of the violence and several reported and unreported case against the people, of the under privileged and the historically disadvantaged group has been largely prevalent in the contemporary Indian society. this has also largely interpreted in the account that all these violence has been blindly been done by the humans against the other human. As per the norms and the theory of Vivekananda, this has largely undermined the human value, and moreover the way in which the ideal human should be treated at all.

Significantly the way in which the idea of the humanism is more resonating with the notion of the humanism, which emphasizes the divinity inside every individual, the unification of faiths, selfless service, and the harmonic fusion of science and spirituality, is firmly anchored in the

philosophical and spiritual traditions of Vedanta (Dewangan and Dewangan, 2022. p.42) and in this manner the idea of the human development is to be the back up of the human society, and in this manner, it is to be rooted in the idea and the philosophy, of the Vedanta, which is not solely a form of the Hindu or the religious philosophy, rather as the form of the moral bounding among the common people, along with the welfare of the common people.

The idea of the humanism is not solely about the human development, rather it is about connecting the idea of the development into a more human centred and socially bounded development.

Relevance of Idea of Vivekananda in the Contemporary Indian Context

The whole idea of Swami Vivekananda, is not solely interpreted as the motive of the spiritual or the theological idea, but rather it is seen in the manner where there is a premonition of the practical idea, along with the humanist approach, which is requisite for the development of the nation, nationalism and over all the idea of the humanism. This is not solely an intent of the proper gathering or the preaching of the certain narrow ideology, rather it demonstrates the view where the religion or the belief is about the liberation of the common individual.

This is also seen in the manner, which says about the motivation of leading the common individuals as well as the Indian society, towards a more biased-free, and moreover, towards a liberated society, which is reformed with reasoning and denoting a proper order of the love and mutual respect of one to another.

Today's communal perspective is not with the concern for the humanity, or with the feeling of the oneness- it doesn't co-relate with the idea of the man being satisfied with the mutual interest, but rather it is strangling the diversity, with creating the idea of the borders against one another, without which there is no interaction for the development of the humanity. Swami Vivekananda's teachings provide timeless wisdom for addressing the pressing challenges of inclusion and diversity in contemporary society. His vision of unity in diversity, (Vivekananda, 1989) ^[9] (Dasgupta, 2005) ^[3] inclusive spirituality, and holistic education offers practical solutions for creating a more just and harmonious world (Bacchar, 2024. p. 99) ^[1] and with this he corresponds to the idea of the inclusivity, and the effectual practice of the equality among the common men, with which it credits to the idea of the superlative citizenry, and the provision of the place, where the idea of the nation is built upon the human basis, and not on the ethnic stratum.

Political equality necessitates the participation of everyone in political processes through voting, contesting elections, and expressing opinions and views without any fear of discrimination. Social equality also means the availability of equal opportunities irrespective of one's birth, caste, creed, religion, and the like.(Chandra, 2024. p. 103

Though not an out and out political thinker, but the ideas and the conviction of Swami Vivekananda mainly forfeits the ideas of the social discrimination and embraces the nomination of the greater and the united society, which is certainly not some mere interpretation or imitation of the Western world, but rather an India, which is grown from its own resource rich and the philosophically backed social system. He also appreciates the idea of the diversity, and thus inculcate a more pure form of the democratic principle.

Conclusion

The ideas of Vivekananda are not only in the line of the theoretical philosophy, but are prevalent in the terms of the practical and the substantial practices, which can lead towards a greater nation in which the citizenry and the common individual can be benefitted. Much to the idea of the resonance and the development of the common people in the norms of their national identity, and along with that the idea of the development of the nation.

References

1. Bacchar A. Swami Vivekananda: A Philosophical Framework for Redefining. *Jamia Journal of Education*,2024:11(1):93-101.
2. Bipin Chandra MM. *Disarray in Institutions of Governance*. In Bipin Chandra MM, *India after Independence 1947-2000*. Penguin Books India, 2013.
3. Dasgupta S. *Social Philosophy of Swami Vivekananda*. Ramakrishna Math, 2005.
4. Kundra N. Exploring Pluralistic Indian Nationalism: Aurobindo, Vivekananda, Gandhi, and Nehru. *Journal of Nationalism, Memory & Language Politics*, 2024, 87-107.
5. Ni Putu Widyastuti CA. Swami Vivekananda's perspective on radicalism and extremism: Tolerance, pluralism, and education as strategic solutions. *Life and Death: Journal of Eschatology*, 2025, 42-56.
6. Pushpa Dewangan BP. Finding the spiritual underpinnings of thought again: Swami Vivekananda's persistent significance in the present. *International Journal of Academic Research and Development*, 2022, 41-45.
7. Sen AP. Vivekanand: Cultural Nationalism. In Singh HRMP, *Indian Political Thought: Themes and Thinkers*. Pearson Education, 2011, 54-69.
8. Singh P. Rediscovering the Spiritual Foundations of Thought: The Enduring Relevance of Swami Vivekananda in Modern Times. *AMOGHVARTA*, 2023, 212-281.
9. Vivekananda S. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*. Advaita Ashrama, 1989, 4(5).