Ideologies and Vision of Swami Vivekananda

Why in News?

Swami Vivekananda Jayanti, also known as National Youth Day since 1984 is celebrated annually on January 12, 2025 to marks his birth anniversary.

What is practical Vedanta of Vivekananda?

Early Life of Swami Vivekananda
• **Birth date** - January 12, 1863. • **Birth name** - Narendra Nath Datta. • **Life span** – 39 years (1863-1902). • **Guru** - *Ramakrishna Paramahamsa* of Bengal, who was introduced in 1881 by Keshab Chandra Sen, the founder of Brahmo Samaj of India where Vivekananda stayed. • **After Ramakrishna's death** – He devoted his life to the *regeneration of Hindu society*. • He sought to *reconcile the dualistic philosophy* he inherited from his master with his belief in Advaita philosophy.

- He believed in the supreme authority of Vedas and the immutable status of Upanishads.
- For him, Vedic religion was both universal and tolerant.
- **Need for a change** - He was of the view that the truths of Vedanta have little appeal for people suffering from hunger and poverty and which led him to introduce his version of practical Vedanta.
- **Practical Vedanta** – It harmonised seemingly incompatible philosophies, including dualism and monism.
    - **Aim** - To integrate devotion to God with compassion for fellow beings.
- **Prioritised the alleviation of poverty** - He found it futile, insulting, and meaningless to preach scriptures without providing food to people suffering from poverty.
- **Social service** – Inspired by his master's words that religion is not for empty stomachs, he emphasised the significance of social service.

*Vivekananda returned to India in 1897 and went on to establish **Ramakrishna Mission (1897**), which primarily worked through social service and preaching. In 1899, he established the Belur Math in Howrah, West Bengal, which became his permanent abode.*

How he revived Hinduism?

- Vivekananda's address at the *World Parliament of Religions in Chicago on September 11, 1893* marked a turning point in the universal assertion of Hindu identity.
- He presented a liberal and humane Hinduism as the path towards progress and unity.

- **Stated the antiquity of Hinduism** - He referred to ***Hinduism as the "mother of religions"***, and asserted its legacy of tolerance and universal acceptance.
- **Projected quality of tolerance** – He reiterated that *tolerance is the core of Hinduism*.
- He highlighted Hinduism's historic role in *offering refuge to persecuted sects* from around the world and affirmed that this sense of tolerance is intrinsic to the "blood of the nation".
- **Interdependence of Hinduism and Buddhism** – He said that "Hinduism cannot live without Buddhism, nor Buddhism without Hinduism.
- Buddhists cannot stand without the brain and philosophy of the Brahmins, nor the Brahmin without the heart of the Buddhist.

What are the various tenets proposed by him?

- **Promoted secularism** – He outrightly *rejected fanatism, sectarianism, and bigotry* that led to violence.
- He argued that ridiculing another's God was tantamount to ridiculing one's own religion.
- **Idea of oneness** – This idea of his stemmed from the *ideals of Vedanta and monism*, which affirm the unity of all existence.
- **Feed the hunger** - Vivekananda preferred to feed the hungry before preaching about God.
- In his Chicago speech in 1983, he also criticised Christian missionaries for prioritising the construction of churches over addressing the plight of the starving.

  Vivekananda stated, "I do not believe in God or religion which cannot wipe the widow's tears or bring a piece of bread to the orphan's mouth."

- **Promotes unity** – He expressed regret for those who envisioned the exclusive survival of their religion, saying that *true religion embraces unity in diversity*.

What is Vivekananda's idea of India's nationalism?

- **Nationalism –** He criticised modern material civilization and *asserted the cultural roots of nationalism* in India.
- It is because of its spiritual foundation, Indian civilization survived the test of time, unlike the Greek, Roman, and Egyptian civilizations.
- **Idea of centre** – He argued that every nation has a centre and its survival depends on preserving this core.
- He found *religion as the centre of India*.
- **Centre of the world's spirituality** – He urged to begin a wave of spirituality to rejuvenate the nation.
- **Vedantic spiritualism** – He viewed it as the *solution to India's subjugation* and the means to saving humanity from the destructive effects of Western materialism.

How his spiritual nationalism helped in freedom struggle?

> *In The Discovery of India, Jawaharlal Nehru wrote that Vivekananda "came as a tonic to the depressed and demoralized Hindu mind."*

- **Inculcated nationalism** – By the 19th century, Hindu mysticism and spirituality played a dominant role in inculcating a sense of national spirit among the masses.
- Vivekananda emerged as one of its earliest and vocal exponents.
- **Influenced leaders** - Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Subhas Chandra Bose, and Mahatma Gandhi got influenced with this idea during India's national movement.

What are the attributes he emphasised for the youth?

- He emphasised that to regenerate the nation, it's important to *overcome physical weakness and embrace masculine qualities* like courage, strength, and resilience.
- **Focus on physical strength** – He argued that the *first step toward national regeneration* was strengthening the body.
- He justified the use of physical force in self-defense, stressing the importance of fighting against oppression.
- **Emphasis on sports** – He believed that the young would be closer to heaven *through football* than reading the Gita.
- **Ascetic nationalist masculinity** – It is a combination of physical strength with spiritual discipline.
- He urged his disciples to be ready to engage in deep meditation and rise from it to go to the field.
    - **Physical vigour** – symbolised by biceps
    - **Gita** – Way to overcome challenges posed by British rule in India.

> *His historic clarion call to "**arise, awake, and stop not** till the goal is reached" inspired Indian leaders to awaken colonial India from its long slumber.*

Quick Facts

Top Quotes of Swami Vivekananda

• We are what our thoughts have made us; so take care about what you think. Words are secondary. Thoughts live; they travel far.
• Arise! Awake! and stop not until the goal is reached.
• The whole secret of existence is to have no fear. Never fear what will become of you, depend on no one. Only the moment you reject all help are you freed.
• The world is the great gymnasium where we come to make ourselves strong.
• The moment I have realized God sitting in the temple of every human body, the moment I stand in reverence before every human being and see God in him - that moment I am free from bondage, everything that binds vanishes, and I am free.
• External nature is only internal nature writ large.
• When an idea exclusively occupies the mind, it is transformed into an actual physical or mental state.
• Our duty is to encourage every one in his struggle to live up to his own highest idea, and strive at the same time to make the ideal as near as possible to the Truth.
• The Vedanta recognizes no sin it only recognizes error. And the greatest error, says the Vedanta is to say that you are weak, that you are a sinner, a miserable creature, and that you have no power and you cannot do this and that.

Reference

[The Indian Express| Vivekananda’s vision for India and Youth]

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