

SWAMI VIVEKANANDA



At a Glance

Date of Birth	12th January, 1863
Place of Birth	Calcutta (Bengal Presidency)
Name of Father	Vishwanath Datta
Name of Mother	Bhuvanewari Devi
Religious View	Hinduism
Education	Calcutta Metropolitan School, Scottish Church College, Presidency College
Date of Death	4th July, 1902
Place of Death	Belur Math, Howrah
Founder/Co-founder	Ramakrishna Mission & Ramakrishna Math
Major Works	Spiritual enlightenment of Indian masses, Spread Vedanta and Yoga philosophy in Western Countries.
Known As	Spiritual & Religious Leaders, Social reformer, Philosopher, Educationist

Introduction

Swami Vivekananda was a Hindu monk and one of the most celebrated spiritual leaders of India. He was more than just a spiritual mind; he was a prolific thinker, great orator and passionate

patriot. He carried on the free-thinking philosophy of his guru, Ramakrishna Paramhansa forward into a new paradigm. He worked tirelessly towards betterment of the society, in servitude of the poor and needy, dedicating his all for his country. He was responsible for the revival of Hindu spiritualism and established Hinduism as a revered religion on world stage. His message of universal brotherhood and self-awakening remains relevant especially in the current backdrop of widespread political turmoil around the world. The young monk and his teachings have been an inspiration to many, and his words have become goals of self-improvement especially for the youth of the country.

Swami Vivekananda was one of the most influential spiritual leaders of Vedanta philosophy. He was the chief disciple of Ramakrishna Paramahansa and was the founder of Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission. Swami Vivekananda was the living embodiment of sacrifice and dedicated his life to the country and yearned for the progress of the poor, the helpless and the downtrodden. He showed a beacon of light to a nation that had lost faith in its ability under British rule and inspired self-confidence among Indians that they are second to none. His ringing words and masterful oratory galvanized the slumbering nation.

Childhood & Early Life

- Swami Vivekananda was born as Narendranath Datta to Vishwanath Datta and Bhuvaneshwari Devi. Professionally, his father was an attorney while his mother was deeply religious.
- He was fondly known as Narendra, he was deeply inspired by his parents who shaped much of his personality and thought process. It was since a young age that Narendra had a spiritual bent of mind.
- He acquired his preliminary education from Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar's Metropolitan Institution before attaining his graduation degree in Arts from the Presidency College, Calcutta.
- By the time Narendra completed his graduation in 1884, he had not only studied Western logic and philosophy but had even read Hindu scriptures in details, thanks to his insatiable urge to read everything.

- After college education, he became a spiritual apprentice. His beliefs were formulated by the Brahmo concepts which admonished idolatry and prophesized the presence of formless God.

Later Life

- Narendra met Ramakrishna in 1881 at Dakhineshwar, where the latter stayed. During this time, Narendra was undergoing a time of spiritual crisis. It was his famous question to Sri Ramakrishna, "Have you seen God?" which transformed his life forever.
- Though Ramakrishna did not convince Narendra completely at the first go, the latter was bowled over by his selfless, unconditional love. Gradually, he became a frequent visitor of Ramakrishna.
- Meanwhile, the tragic death of his father Vishwanath Datta led Narendra to get closer to Ramakrishna who by then had helped Narendra move out of his spiritual crisis situation so much so that he was ready to renounce everything for the sake of realising God.
- In 1885, Ramakrishna was diagnosed with throat cancer which led him to relocate to a garden house in Cossipore. Narendra, along with fellow students, took great care of his master and nursed him with utmost devotion and love.
- Before renouncing his body, Ramakrishna made Narendra the leader of a new monastic order, which highlighted the importance of service to men as the most effective form of worship of God.
- After the death of Ramakrishna, Narendra along with his young disciples began to live at Baranagar. It was in 1887 that they took the formal vows of sannyasa, thereby assuming new names. Narendra came to be known as Swami Vivekananda.
- In 1888, to profess the message of Ramakrishna to the world, Swami Vivekananda resolved to embark on a journey, extensively exploring India in the initial years. He walked on foot, lived on alms and led a life of a wandering monk.
- It was during his exploration of the country that he was exposed to the abysmal poverty and backwardness present

amongst the masses. He was the first religious leader to claim the neglect of the masses as the major reason for the country's breakdown.

- He understood that the masses required two kinds of knowledge—one which allowed them to improve their economic condition and the second which helped them to build faith and strengthen their moral sense.
- To accomplish his goal of bettering the life of the masses, Swami Vivekananda aimed at initiating an organization which aimed at serving the poor and uplifting their standard by providing them education. He even targeted at improving the life of women in society.
- In 1893, he travelled abroad for the first time to be a part of the World's Parliament of Religions. He believed that the Parliament would not only provide him a bigger platform to spread the message of Ramakrishna, but also help him gain financial help for his project of uplifting the masses.
- At the Parliament, Swami Vivekananda became known as the 'orator of divine right' and 'Messenger of Indian wisdom to the Western World'. For the next three years and a half, Vivekananda extensively travelled in the eastern part of US and London to spread the message of Vedanta.
- Upon returning to India in 1897, Swami Vivekananda gave a series of lecture to different parts of the country before finally returning to Calcutta. He initiated Ramakrishna Mission, an organization which propagated the teaching of Practical Vedanta and commenced various forms of social service such as hospitals, schools, colleges, hostels, rural development centres and so on.
- In 1898, Swami Vivekananda acquired a huge property at Belur which became a permanent abode of the monastery and monastic order. The place became known as Ramakrishna Math and was open to all men. Vivekananda adopted ancient monastic ideals to the conditions of modern life.

Contribution in the field of Education with special emphasis on Women Education

Man-making Education

Swamiji does not accept information as education. He advocates a type of education, which is man-making, life-building and character-formation. Education should also help in the development of originality. It should unfold all the hidden powers in man. A child should learn to accept pleasure and pain, misery and happiness as equal factors in the formation of character. Man-making education is inherent in character development as well as vocational development. What India needs today is character and strengthening of the will. This can be achieved through man-making education. Man-making education also brings out the significance of the famous words said by Vivekananda at the World Parliament of Religions held in 1893 at Chicago. These were, "Help, Assimilation, Harmony and Peace". Accordingly education should develop these qualities in man.

'Our great national sin is the neglect of the masses and that is the cause of our downfall' said Swamiji. He fully realized that, "A nation is advanced in proportion as education and intelligence is spread among the masses." This reflects his urge for ensuring equity in educational opportunities to all for true national development. He respected human individuality and chanted the mantra, "each soul is potentially divine" and is endowed with capacity and creativity. [According to Swamiji : Education is the birth right of every human being, it is a biological, social economic and spiritual necessity.]

Women Education

According to Swamiji—"The real strength or 'Shakti' of a country are its women." He quotes Manu—"Daughters should be supported and educated with as much care and attention as the sons." He wanted women to be free from all fetters as self-respecting persons, with their own individuality, and was in favour of women being given such training as would infuse them with strength so that they can tackle the problem that face them.

Swami Vivekananda desires that all the time been trained in helplessness, servile dependence on others. What a pity that they are good only to weep their eyes at the slightest approach of a mishap or danger. He forcefully advocates that they should acquire the 'spirit of valour and heroism'. In the present day it has become necessary for them also to learn self-defence. See how grand was the Queen of Jhansi. Vivekananda again states, 'If you do not raise the women who are the living embodiment of the divine Mother, don't think that you have any other way to rise. He stresses that the country and the nation which do not respect the woman have never become great, nor will ever be in future.' He pleaded that 'Brahmcharinis of the education and character should take up the task of teaching'. Because through such devout preaches of character, there will be the real spread of female education in the country. Vivekananda observed that women education should be spread with 'religion as its centre'.