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## DIGNITY AND EMPOWERMENT: RELEVANCE OF VIVEKANANDA'S THOUGHTS FOR TRIBAL UPLIFTMENT

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### ABSTRACT:

This article explores how the ideas of Swami Vivekananda might direct the improvement of India's tribal groups, who have long endured societal neglect, poverty, and illiteracy. Vivekananda urged society to treat the impoverished with compassion and respect because he thought that everyone had potential and inherent dignity. His views on education, independence, and mass empowerment are directly relevant to the problems that tribal communities are currently facing. To help tribal people better their lives without sacrificing their traditional identity, the article also details how monks from the Ramakrishna Mission have put his ideas into practice by establishing schools, health facilities, and skill-building programmes in tribal communities. India can give tribal people equitable opportunity and guarantee their full participation in the development of the country by implementing Vivekananda's vision.

**KEYWORDS:** Tribal society in India, Swami Vivekananda's views on tribal empowerment.

### INTRODUCTION:

India's tribal people, referred to as the Adivasis, are some of the nation's most ancient and culturally affluent inhabitants; nonetheless, they have suffered from institutional neglect and marginalisation for generations. Dispersed among woods, hills, and secluded areas, tribal communities possess distinct customs, dialects, and social structures that constitute a vital aspect of India's past. Nevertheless, colonial practices, economic exploitation, and contemporary development initiatives have frequently displaced them, exacerbating cycles of

poverty and marginalisation. Many indigenous territories continue to experience low literacy rates, inadequate healthcare, insufficient infrastructure, and restricted access to opportunities. Confronting these difficulties necessitates both tangible assistance and a revolutionary vision grounded in respect, decency, and empowerment.

Swami Vivekananda, a prominent Indian thinker and spiritual leader, presented a compelling vision via his impactful concepts of education, service, and social justice. While he did not explicitly reference "tribal society" in his writings, his doctrines on the elevation of the impoverished, the inherent dignity of each human, and the ethical need to assist the marginalised clearly address the circumstances encountered by tribal people. His renowned assertions—such as, "Each soul is potentially divine" and "As long as the millions endure hunger and ignorance, I deem every man a traitor..."—urge society to acknowledge the intrinsic value of every individual, particularly those who are most marginalised.

Vivekananda asserted that genuine advancement resides in the empowerment of the populace, including India's tribal communities, via education that fosters character, practical competencies, and self-sufficiency. He advocated for an educational framework that extended to the most isolated settlements, honouring local customs while maximising each child's potential. He advocated for the integration of Western scientific knowledge with India's spiritual wisdom to cultivate a generation capable of altering the nation. His assertion that serving the impoverished is the highest expression of religion compels every citizen to actively contribute to alleviating the plight of the deprived.

His ideas for tribal communities promote respectful inclusiveness, self-assurance, and opportunity for economic and social progress, rather than assimilation or the obliteration of individuality. Vivekananda's worldview provides a remedy for both paternalistic charity and exploitative development by prioritising the agency and dignity of tribal individuals. His concepts motivated the Ramakrishna Mission and other entities to establish educational institutions, healthcare facilities, and vocational initiatives in tribal regions, illustrating the practical application of his philosophy.

As India seeks to create an inclusive and fair society, Vivekananda's enduring remarks underscore that the nation cannot progress without elevating those who have been marginalised. His principles remain pertinent in discussions of tribal rights, displacement, education, and sustainable development. They advocate for a comprehensive strategy that

harmonises contemporary advancement with safeguarding tribal customs and traditions. His worldview fosters genuine national unity by anchoring tribal development initiatives in compassion, respect, and empowerment.

This article seeks to examine Swami Vivekananda's seminal works and speeches in relation to tribal societies, emphasising the relevance of his global advocacy for dignity, education, and social service in confronting the ongoing issues encountered by India's Adivasis. This research aims to elucidate how Vivekananda's philosophy might inform policies and initiatives that enhance tribal lives while respecting their distinct identities. By reengaging with his ideas, India may establish a moral and pragmatic framework to attain inclusive progress that encompasses all communities. In doing so, we fulfil not just a social duty but also a spiritual imperative that recognises the holiness inherent in every tribal child, woman, and man.

### **Objectives:**

1. To examine Swami Vivekananda's perspectives on social elevation and assess their applicability in confronting the contemporary issues encountered by India's tribal populations.
2. To investigate how Vivekananda's vision may inform practical tactics for uplifting tribal communities via education, self-sufficiency, and reverence for their traditional identity.

**Methodology:** This study employs a qualitative and analytical methodology to examine the significance of Swami Vivekananda's ideas for the advancement of India's tribal groups. An exhaustive analysis of original materials, including The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda and public speeches and writings, forms the foundation of the research. Secondary materials, including biographies, yearly reports, mission periodicals (Prabuddha Bharata), and pertinent academic literature on tribal education and social work, were examined to contextualise Vivekananda's views within the historical and present issues encountered by tribal communities. The study explores the conceptual aspects of Vivekananda's ideology and practical instances of its implementation in tribal regions. Textual analysis was employed to understand chosen quotations and utterances, concentrating on the themes of dignity, education, self-reliance, and social justice. We analysed fieldwork reports and case studies of Ramakrishna Mission activities in tribal areas to assess the tangible impacts of programs shaped by Vivekananda's vision. The technique seeks to link theoretical frameworks with practical actions, offering a comprehensive insight into how

Vivekananda's philosophy might inform effective initiatives for contemporary tribal empowerment.

## **DISCUSSION:**

India's tribal communities, referred to as Adivasis, represent some of the nation's oldest populations, maintaining diverse traditions, languages, and lifestyles. Comprising approximately 8.6% of India's population, these groups inhabit forests, hills, and remote areas, representing more than 700 officially recognised tribes. Many tribes, despite their cultural diversity, encounter shared challenges including poverty, limited access to education and healthcare, and threats to their land and livelihoods. Historically marginalised and excluded from mainstream developments, these groups persist in their pursuit of social justice and economic opportunities. Empowering individuals and safeguarding their rights is crucial for the establishment of an inclusive and equitable India.

Every human being is divine: "*Each soul is potentially divine. The goal is to manifest this divinity...*" *Complete Works, Vol. 2, "The Real and the Apparent Man"*

This concept disavows any conception of intrinsic inferiority. Swami Vivekananda once said, "Every soul has the capacity to be divine." The objective is to bring this divinity to life, which asserts that all people, especially those from tribal cultures, are equally valuable. It emphasises that indigenous people have intrinsic potential and rejects any social or caste-based hierarchy. In order for indigenous people to reach their full potential, he advocates for education and opportunity. They also emphasised how important it is to honour tribal traditions as manifestations of human worth. This kind of thinking establishes a moral basis for strengthening indigenous people via social justice, education, and independence.

*"So long as the millions live in hunger and ignorance, I hold every man a traitor who, having been educated at their expense, pays not the least heed to them!"*— *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda, Vol. 3, "The Future of India"*

The importance of uplifting the masses, including tribal and forest-dwelling communities, is emphasised. This includes the tribal and forest-dwelling people who were among those millions. In his remark, Swami Vivekananda emphasises society's obligation to impoverished millions, including the tribal populations of India. He criticises well-educated individuals who fail to acknowledge the hardships endured by those who truly paid for their status. Many

tribal people in colonial and contemporary India continue to go hungry and lack access to education. According to what he says, educated Indians must actively contribute to the welfare and advancement of their tribes. This concept advocates taking concrete steps—rather than relying just on compassion or alms—to eradicate poverty and illiteracy among tribal people.

*“If the poor boy cannot come to education, education must go to him.”* — *Complete Works*, Vol. 5, Letters. Education must reach the poor: According to Swami Vivekananda's declaration, all children, including those in the most isolated or marginalised areas, must have access to education. Tribal children who live in highlands and forests frequently face social and physical obstacles that prevent them from attending school. He advocates using outreach initiatives, community learning centres, or mobile schools to deliver education directly to tribal settlements. This method empowers individuals with information while honouring their surroundings and ways of life. It highlights that integrating tribes into schools rather than ignoring them is essential to real societal advancement.

*“Our duty is to encourage everyone in his struggle to live and to uplift him so that he may stand on his own feet.”*— *Complete Works*, Vol. 6, “Our Duty to the Masses” He included tribal communities that faced neglect and exploitation in his understanding of “the masses”. The comments of Swami Vivekananda serve as a reminder that we should encourage everyone's attempts to better their lives. This entails assisting indigenous tribes in overcoming social marginalisation, poverty, and illiteracy. Giving charity is not true upliftment; rather, it is enabling tribal people to gain independence and self-assurance. This includes offering healthcare, education, and employment possibilities. His teachings advocate for preserving tribal dignity and empowering people to proudly stand on their own two feet.

*“They alone live who live for others, the rest are more dead than alive.”* — *Complete Works*, Vol. 4, “The Secret of Work”-This appeal to selfless service serves as the cornerstone of any Vivekananda-inspired tribal welfare initiative. According to Swami Vivekananda, living a real life entails giving selflessly to others. It urges society to actively strive for the wellbeing of tribal people rather than disregarding their hardships. One approach to genuinely live with meaning is to assist native groups in obtaining rights, health care, and education. According to him, those who ignore the pain of indigenous peoples are

"more dead than alive." His remarks push us to actively support tribal people as a necessary component of a fulfilling existence.

*"The only hope of India is from the masses. The upper classes are physically and morally dead..."* - Complete Works" – Volume 5, Essay: "The Problem of India" -- His persistent focus on "masses" includes rural and indigenous communities. Swami Vivekananda's statements emphasise that India's true strength and destiny lie in empowering its people rather than relying solely on a privileged few. For tribal society, this entails recognising that tribal populations, which are frequently among India's poorest, have enormous potential to contribute to the country's prosperity if given the opportunity. His assertion that the "upper classes are physically and morally dead" criticises.

*"Our solution is not the rejection of the lower classes, but the acceptance of all, and the uplifting of the lowest..."* "Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda" – Volume 3, Lecture: "The Future of India" (Madras, 1897) This applies specifically to tribal communities, which were among the most marginalised groups in colonial India. Swami Vivekananda's assertion advocates for an inclusive society that neither ostracises nor disparages any group, particularly the most marginalised individuals. It advocates the recognition of tribal groups as essential components of the country rather than marginalising or disregarding them. His perspective emphasises that genuine advancement arises from elevating the most marginalised, including tribal communities, which have historically endured poverty, isolation, and prejudice. This entails guaranteeing equal opportunities in school, work, and social engagement while honouring their own culture. Vivekananda's statements serve as a compelling reminder that national unity and strength hinge on uplifting people in the lowest strata, including our tribal brethren.

*"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."* Complete Works, Vol. 4, "The Education that India Needs": His emphasis on vocational, moral, and practical education is exactly what indigenous people have needed to become self-sufficient. In his writings, Swami Vivekananda emphasises the need for education that develops independence, character, and intelligence. For indigenous societies, this entails a shift from memorisation to education that equips people with self-assurance, useful skills, and moral fortitude. This kind of education should honour tribal tradition while equipping kids with the skills they need to succeed in a world that's changing. Tribal adolescents may end cycles of poverty and

marginalisation by developing strong morals and widening their horizons. According to Vivekananda's vision, education must genuinely change people's lives so that tribal people might prosper independently and with dignity.

*“Let each one of us pray day and night for the downtrodden millions... for they alone are India.”*—*Complete Works, Vol. 6, Letter to Mary Hale*: Later tribal welfare activity was inspired by his demand for educated Indians to help the underprivileged. The nation's spirit is found in the upliftment of India's oppressed millions; therefore, let's pray and strive for them. Tribal communities are among them; despite their old cultures and unrealised potential, they endure starvation, neglect, and a loss of rights. Swami Vivekananda's remarks serve as a reminder that strengthening tribal people is the real route to India's power and unity, not just charity.

*“Feel, my children, feel; feel for the poor, the ignorant, the downtrodden; feel till the heart stops and the brain reels and you think you will go mad with that feeling. Then pour the soul out at the feet of the Lord, and then will come power, help, and indomitable energy.”*—*Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda, Vol. 6, Letters March 3, 1894* to Swami Swarupananda. This compelling appeal for profound empathy motivated his disciples to venture into India's most isolated and impoverished areas. requires not passive pity but profound, compelling compassion that incites action. It underscores the imperative to acknowledge the prolonged exploitation, relocation, and social marginalisation endured by India's indigenous populations. His statements urge us to allow the plight of indigenous peoples to deeply affect us, prompting a commitment to enhance their lives via education, healthcare, and economic empowerment. This sentiment pertains not to sympathy, but to honouring their dignity and striving to reinstate their rights and possibilities. According to Vivekananda, genuine power and spiritual vitality to reform our society and ourselves can only be attained by dedicating ourselves to assisting the most marginalised, such as tribal societies.

*“Each nation has a destiny to fulfil, each individual has a destiny to fulfil. The divinity within has to come out. The Indian nation cannot remain ignorant and degraded. ... She must be raised.”*—*Complete Works, Vol. 4, “India’s Mission* “Elevating India required raising its most marginalised citizens, particularly tribal people. This highlights that real success in India depends on maximising the potential of all individuals, including those who are currently underutilised. For tribal tribes, the task entails realising that their advancement is

crucial to India's future—not as foreigners, but as a vital part of the country's might. In order for tribal people to recognise their own divinity and fully contribute to India's destiny, he urges the ignorance and structural neglect that keep them in poverty be eradicated. We raise India as a whole by providing tribal people with economic possibilities, education, and cultural respect. According to this viewpoint, tribal empowerment is essential to achieving the country's full potential rather than being a charity.

*"It is mockery to offer religion to a starving man. First give him food, then religion."*— *Complete Works*, Vol. 4, "Address at Madras"— He staunchly contended that advocating religion or morals to individuals enduring hunger, poverty, and misery was both vacuous and hypocritical. His statements, as applied to India's tribal groups, emphasise the imperative to fulfil fundamental requirements, such as nourishment, health, and education, prior to anticipating their complete engagement in spiritual or national affairs. For several tribal individuals experiencing persistent poverty and starvation, Vivekananda's message serves as an appeal to society, government, and organisations to prioritise urgent, concrete assistance. Only by first guaranteeing that tribal communities have access to food, housing, and possibilities for self-sufficiency can authentic spiritual, social, and cultural development occur, hence establishing a platform for significant engagement in India's progress.

*"We need muscles of iron and nerves of steel. ... Give them ideas — that is the only way to uplift them. ... Manufacture your own goods — weave your own cloth. ... Small industries must be started."*— *Complete Works*, Vol. 5, "Notes of Class Talks and Lectures". In tribal belts, this serves as the cornerstone for self-reliance initiatives. Swami Vivekananda's appeal for "muscles of iron and nerves of steel" highlights the necessity of fortitude, bravery, and resolve to change society. His counsel to "give them ideas" relates directly to equipping indigenous communities with the information, abilities, and self-assurance they need to end the poverty cycle. He provides a viable way for indigenous people to make a living without giving up their lands or customs by promoting small businesses and self-reliance, such as producing items or weaving textiles. This perspective encourages economic independence, lessens exploitation, and strengthens local economies while respecting tribal identity. According to Vivekananda, real upliftment occurs when indigenous people are empowered to stand up and take control of their destiny rather than when they receive charity.

*"What good will it do to the lower classes if the higher classes simply talk religion? Let them come down and live with the poor, share their misery for some time — feel with them —*

*struggle with them — and then they will see what is needed.”*— *Complete Works*, Vol. 6, Letters. Instead of patronising marginalised populations, this literature advocates engaging directly with them. Openly criticise vapid rhetoric and flimsy altruism. He urges well-educated and affluent individuals to step outside of their comfort zones and interact with tribal tribes firsthand by learning about their struggles and living circumstances. Instead of imposing answers from a distance, those in positions of authority may realise what true help is required by sharing the reality of poverty, relocation, and lack of opportunity encountered by indigenous people. His message demands real unity, empathy, and grassroots action for tribal upliftment, rejecting token gestures. The only way society can really and significantly improve the lives of indigenous people is by getting deeply involved.

*“This is the gist of all worship — to be pure and to do good to others. He who sees Shiva in the poor, in the weak, and in the diseased, really worships Shiva.”*— *Complete Works*, Vol. 4, “Address at Rameswaram” His practical Vedanta, which pertains to tribal upliftment, is based on the idea that God is present in the impoverished. Preach that helping people in need is the path to real spirituality. This entails acknowledging the spiritual presence in tribal people, who frequently face social rejection, poverty, and disease. Vivekananda urges that tribal people be treated with dignity and respect as representatives of the holy, rather than demeaning or pitying them. We engage in true worship when we assist tribal people in obtaining justice, healthcare, and education; this uplifts both the served and the server. His message makes it abundantly evident that improving the lives of indigenous people is a spiritual obligation of the highest calibre, not merely social labour.

*“Who are the real children of Mother India? ... The poor, the illiterate, the cobbler, the sweeper — they have suffered through centuries. ... You will have to feel for them.”*— *Complete Works*, Vol. 5, “Conversations and Dialogues” -His reference to “the real children” includes the most marginalised, including indigenous communities. Identify the individuals who genuinely represent the essence of the nation. In the context of tribal society, this entails acknowledging tribals as genuine constituents of India, whose existence has been characterised by centuries of neglect, exploitation, and marginalisation. His exhortation to “feel for them” necessitates empathy and action, compelling society to recognise tribal individuals not as outsiders or liabilities but as essential to India's identity and destiny. Incorporating indigenous communities into education, economic prospects, and national development acknowledges their status as genuine sons and daughters of Mother India.

Vivekananda's message asserts that national development is contingent upon the elevation of its most marginalised groups, especially tribal people, with dignity and fairness.

### **CONCLUSION:**

The Ramakrishna Mission has recently made substantial contributions to tribal education in India through its comprehensive and service-focused methodology. In states including Chhattisgarh, Bihar, Odisha, West Bengal, and Meghalaya, the Mission operates residential ashrama schools and dormitories for tribal youth. These institutes offer complimentary education, as well as sustenance, apparel, medical treatment, and ethical instruction. The mission targets first-generation indigenous students residing in isolated and wooded areas. Contemporary amenities, like digital classrooms and practical training, have been integrated with conventional education. A particular focus is placed on value education, influenced by the principles of Swami Vivekananda. We honour local tribal culture and education in the mother tongue at the basic level. Scholarships and mentorship assist indigenous youth in pursuing higher education. Health and nutrition initiatives enhance retention and educational results. The Ramakrishna Mission significantly empowers tribal tribes by providing comprehensive and sustainable education.

India is still trying to help its tribal groups, who have been poor, illiterate, and left out of society for generations, and Swami Vivekananda's ideas are still very important. His call for everyone to see the divinity and worth that are already inside them pushes people to see tribal people not as backward or less important but as peers with their own cultures and strengths. According to Vivekananda, a country could not rise if millions of its people were still dumb and poor. This idea is still true in primitive societies today. His focus on education as the key to unlocking people's potential makes it clear that tribal areas need good schools that are adapted to their languages and customs.

His stress on economic independence is also very important. This helps small businesses and industries grow so that tribal people can make a living without leaving their homes or losing their culture. His message doesn't call for charity or token help; instead, it calls for real strength based on love, respect, and useful help. The monks of the Ramakrishna Math and Mission have made this goal a reality by setting up schools, housing, job centres and health programs in parts of India where tribal people live. These attempts show that Vivekananda's ideas can help create long-lasting ways for tribes to grow and progress.

His theory also says that those who are fortunate have a moral duty to work directly with underprivileged groups, breaking down barriers like caste, class, and social distance. Volunteers and teachers can better understand the needs of tribal people and come up with answers that are successful and respectful of their culture if they live and work with them. Vivekananda's ideas also remind policymakers that uplifting tribal people must put both social justice and economic chance at the top of the list. This will make sure that tribal people are fully involved in India's growth. His call to care deeply about the poor until you are moved to act requires a compassionate, not a paternalistic, attitude towards tribe welfare. Vivekananda dreamed of an India where modernity and custom work together to help everyone, even the most disadvantaged. He did this by combining Western science knowledge with spiritual ideals. His ideas make us want to value the unique things that tribal cultures bring to the world instead of trying to force them to blend in or removing their identities.

In the end, Vivekananda's vision shows India how to become truly united and strong by helping every group, especially those who are on the outside. Right now, we can use his ideas to help tribe kids and families get an education, good health, respect, and hope for a better future. This way of doing things is not only necessary for the economy or society; it is also a moral task to honour the divine in every person. People who work for an open and caring India are still inspired by Swami Vivekananda's ideas. His timeless lesson shows that the country can only reach its fullest potential by helping the weakest.

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