

## How Nehru Helped in Spreading Vivekananda's Ideas?

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In his classic book [“The Discovery of India”](#) Jawaharlal Nehru has devoted 6 pages describing the philosophy of Swami Vivekananda. He did not devote that many pages in it to anyone among the modern leaders except Mahatma Gandhi.

Nehru wrote this book in early 1940s while he was imprisoned in Ahmednagar jail during the freedom movement. I have a feeling that this book after its publication in 1946, was widely read in India and abroad and must have played an important role in informing the general public about the seminal ideas of [Swami Vivekananda](#).

Vivekananda was already famous in certain sections of Indian society especially in Bengal and south India but the general public in India probably was not aware of his many ideas and Nehru's book must have made them known on large scale. And thus it is creditable to the vision and foresight of Nehru that he understood the value of Vivekananda's thought and wrote about it.

Nehru was very much influenced by the modern outlook of Vivekananda's teachings since they blended science and spirituality. Also the practical ideas of Vivekananda who said that spirituality cannot be taught on empty stomach and the rejuvenation of India can only take place when the poverty is reduced appealed to Nehru. This was probably the first example of practical Vedanta!

Too often people criticize Nehru for being woolly eyed secular person but do not realize that he was a visionary and took a pan Indian approach about

the pressing problems of the time. Vivekananda's scientific and spiritual message together with its practical focus therefore appealed to him tremendously.

For example Vivekananda's international approach where he said that we should have a new Indian Society which will be a blend of European Society with India's spirituality was quite revolutionary and appealed to Nehru's international outlook. This is similar to what Mahatma Gandhi said in his [Round Table Conference speech in 1931](#) when he proposed a real Commonwealth between an independent India with its huge market and labor force and helped by British technology and innovation.

Nehru, himself a socialist, was also impressed by Vivekananda's socialist thinking and quotes him, "I am a socialist not because I think it is a perfect system but half a loaf is better than no bread. The other systems have been tried and found wanting and let this one be tried if for nothing else, for the novelty of thing".

Besides Nehru also liked the secular outlook of Vivekananda who believed in the unity of all religions and had said many times that they are just different paths leading to the same universal truth. I think he was really taken aback by the audacious approach of Vivekananda when he wrote to his Muslim friend, "For our own motherland a junction of the two great systems, Hinduism and Islam- Vedanta brain and Islam body – is the only hope!" I wonder what the present Hindu die-hard Vivekananda followers might think of it.

I think all great men have similar thinking. Some of the speeches of Vivekananda that he gave during his travels in India mirror the type of speeches that Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru gave much later on.

The abject poverty and degradation of thought that Vivekananda saw during his travels in India touched him deeply just like they had touched Mahatma

Gandhi and Nehru later on and Nehru was simply echoing those ideas in The Discovery of India.

Vivekananda was much before Nehru's time and people may have known about him from his writings and speeches that were published by Advaita and Ramakrishna Ashram Press from time to time. However those publications were sporadically printed and not available to large number of people all over India.

Nehru's "The Discovery of India", which was widely publicized and readily available in public libraries and those of schools and colleges, might have kindled in people's mind a desire to know about Vivekananda and thus I feel that Nehru might have been responsible in rediscovering him.

Jawaharlal Nehru's 56<sup>th</sup> death anniversary will fall on 27<sup>th</sup> May. Let us remember on that day this great soul of India who was not only a great democratic Prime Minister but also an intellectual and helped make Vivekananda famous and an icon for the millions of Indians. Let us also ponder on the irony that the man (Nehru) whom many criticize today as a pseudo secularist gave them their icon - Vivekananda!

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