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## Vivekananda and Vivekananda Kendra; A critical appraisal

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### Abstract

Vivekananda is a key figure of nineteenth century renaissance. He has influence all sectors of human life in an enormous way. Nevertheless, he has been represented, misrepresented and deconstructed by various organizations both in personal and institutional level. Vivekananda Kendra situated in Kanya Kumari spanning over its branches to whole of India and abroad is one among them. The current study approaches the nuances of Vivekananda Kendra towards Vivekananda. The aim of the study is to assess the commonality and divergence between ideas of Vivekananda and ideology Vivekananda Kendra propagates.

**Keywords:** Appropriation, Vivekananda, Vivekananda Kendra, representation

### Introduction

Swami Vivekananda, a prominent figure of 19<sup>th</sup> century India has not only being represented or misrepresented through his ideas and persona but he is being used as an institutional assert. There are numerous institutions, both private and public, has been built in the name of Vivekananda. Both in India and abroad the institutional mandate on Vivekananda has generated many question. The non-government organizations also being named after Vivekananda. For instance “Swami Vivekananda youth movement” of Mysore is one among them. It propagates the basic ideas of Swami Vivekananda such as Satya, Ahimsa, Seva and Tyaga. However, the ideals are attributed to swami Vivekananda are sacrosanct at times for society. But the institution which seeks its ideals in the name of Vivekananda need to understand that at any point of time, Vivekananda and his ideas need not to be politicized. On the other hand, Ramakrishna Mission is an institution propagates the Ramakrishna-Vivekananda ideal. However, Vivekananda himself has established the institution for twin purpose. This is, “Atmano Mokshaya Jagat Hitaya Cha”, which means the salvation of the self and the upliftment of world. Nevertheless critics even term this Ramakrishna Mission as Saffron Mission. For them, the mission has an inherent aim of Hindutva ideal. It is because there are many compatible ideas between the saffron brotherhood and the Mission. Both of the above believe that Hinduism is in danger, it consolidate and defend Hinduism making it more aggressive and expansionist. It further checks the growing influences of Christianity and created a Hindu polemic. Beside Ramakrishna Mission one more institution takes the guise in the name of Vivekananda. It is Vivekananda Kendra. Though the earlier does not carry the name of Vivekananda, the later does it. The style, dress, way of functioning and ideas of the two institutions differ vehemently. Whereas Ramakrishna Mission follows a monastic order adding Swami and Ananda in their name Renunciating the worldly affair wearing the saffron rob, the later does not follow any monastic order and they wear white Kurta, Dhoti Pajama. Unlike Ramakrishna Mission, Vivekananda Kendra does not follow either Ramakrishna or Sarada Cult. So these differences in the approach of these two organizations make the case further interesting as two why the Kendra emerges? Although there was Ramakrishna Mission to propagate the ideals of Swami Vivekananda, what best Kendra can urges to do. The case of the later need to be very interesting and to be discuss in detail with a critical approach.

### Foundation of Vivekananda Kendra

To commemorate the birth centenary of Swami Vivekananda in 1963, the RSS leadership decided to celebrate it in a grant way to pay the homage to the Swami. An idea to build out a lay order inside the sea rock of the southern tip of India in the name of Vivekananda was proposed.

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It draws its attention from Vivekananda who once said that “Even after I lay down the body, I would continue to work and inspire generations to come to carry my unfinished work”.

Thus Vivekananda memorial, as it stands today is a memorial to Swami as to Shri Eknath Ranade, whose devotion to the work he had undertaken is not inspired by mere faith but by intellectual conviction. On the other hand, the building of the huge memorial was justified seeking the case that Vivekananda completed the passage of Wondering Monk at Kanyakumari and meditated at the rock near by the sea. The dates given to this are on 25<sup>th</sup>, 26<sup>th</sup>, 27<sup>th</sup> December 1892. The apologetics of the memorial argued that, at Kanyakumari started the rock memorial which is a unique symbol in which purity and unity dwells and that is the united symbol of nation. It too depicts the architectural beauty of the country. It is a symbol of unity because whole nation wished it, work and contributes for it. Person from all states participated in the inauguration. It is a memorial because conceived and labored mainly by RSS Swayamsevakas, blessed by Ramakrishna mission, designed by paramacharya of kanchi kamakiti peetham and for which swami Chinmoyananda of Chinmaya Mission gave the first donation. All the spiritual, cultural and national organizations supported it. It is also a memorial for which all state government and central government contributed .thus, the memorial became the focal point just as Kanyakumari is the meeting place of three seats. On the other hand, it is presupposed that Vivekananda meditated in the rock and got to know about the past, present and future of India and got the idea of Advaita Vedanta, which he took to the west further. It was on the rock that Vivekananda discovered glorious India and later shook the world with Indian spirituality. This place has been taken as a sanctified place to build the memorial. However, the building of the memorial was not that innocent. A hard struggle had to be done for this. The opposition came from the large Roman Catholic community in Kanyakumari. They argued that the cross brought by Saint Francis Xavier was there in the rock <sup>[1]</sup>. To see this polar over view the Tamil Nadu government denied the permission to the committee to build the memorial. So finally the committee and its secretary approach to the Member of Parliament to pursue them to allow building the memorial. This got a huge publicity and the committee succeeded in getting the signature of all Members. The lone member who denied signing is E.M.S Namboodripad of Kerla. However, the plan to build the massive structure inside the sea got the political clearance. It further doubled the zeal of the RSS members who have taken the responsibility to build the lay order. The enthusiasm within the RSS leadership for this structure can be seen clearly through their mouth piece “organizer”. It was nevertheless declared the pan Hindu consciousness. The committee organized functions after functions to reach to the like-minded people. A grand function was held at Tilak Ghat of Triplicane Bridge where Golwalkar, Chinmayananda, Tenneti Viswanathan etc were present. For all India Chinmaya Mission, Swami Chinmayananda donated 10,000 rupees to the memorial fund <sup>[2]</sup>. The foundation of this memorial was laid by Sri M.P Shivagnana. Where it has categorically said to the minority not to obstruct but welcome the memorial <sup>[3]</sup>. Despite these odds and struggle, inaugurating the rock memorial on September 2, 1970, the president of India shri V.V Giri

called upon the fellow Indians to raise to the call of the nation. Pointing out the secular characteristics of Vivekananda, the president reminded us about the humanism and intense love Vivekananda carried towards the poor. Speaking on the occasion Shri M. Karunanidhi also raises the same issues and describes Vivekananda a messiah of masses <sup>[4]</sup>. About a fortnight after the opening of Vivekananda Rock Memorial, the Prime Minister Shrimati Indira Gandhi Visited Kanyakumari to participate in the two months long celebrations organized by committee to mark the completion of Memorial. Later speaking at the meeting organized in honour of her, the Prime Minister laid her stress on the master spirit of Vivekananda. She said, Vivekananda followed a balanced approach by removing both material poverty and spiritual poverty <sup>[4]</sup>.

From here started the story of Vivekanandea Kendra. Vivekananda Kendra (henceforth VK) is a later construction of rock memorial. Of course the dream to build a Kendra to take care of the memorial and ideals of Swami was earlier there in the mind of the committee. It is clear from the view of the secretary of the Organizing committee Eknath Ranade. For Ranade, “the rock memorial is only a part of the dream. What is our aspiration? We want to found a service Organization or a mission on the line of Ramakrishna Mission, but to be manned by non-Sannyasin. It will appeal the All India Dedicated cadres both man and women, for being employed to work with back ward class and areas of the country for the social and spiritual wellbeing of the country.” <sup>[5]</sup> it enhance in believing “spiritually oriented service mission”, which seeks to translate of Swami Vivekananda’s vision of glorious India in to action. To actualize the vision, Kendra undertakes many projects, activities, Exhibitions and literary publications. It also mobilize life workers, local workers to carry out various service activities through Yoga, camps for youth and women, Rural Development, Education, Development of natural resources and Tribal welfare etc. However, the vision of Vivekananda and the action of Kendra had to be tested further to get a clear picture. Behind the ideal of Kendra we can see a quotation of Vivekananda, who says:

“An aggregate or a congregation of men does not make a nation, nor do the geographical area and duration of time qualify a society to be known as a nation. A government formed on such a basis can be called a state, but not a nation. It is common goal or mission that makes a nation. All the constituents strive collectively for something noble, Service with spiritual orientation results in man-making which invariably and inseparably connected with nation building”.

Hopefully this is the famous statement which the Kendra takes as “Maha mantra”. In every day to day activity, this saying of Vivekananda is used to inspire the Kendra workers. Thus VK is said to be a “Rashtriya Yajna” which tries to protect the nation. It tries to maintain the rock memorial which has been created by patriotic minded people for the entire nation. It is to make it note that Eknath ji was chosen by Param Pujya Guruji Golwalkar to take up the challenging task. So after the construction of rock memorial the second phase started with the creation of Vivekananda Kendra. Pointing out to these once Eknathji said

“To put up a cement and concrete structure is not my work for which I am born, I am to erect a living and dynamic

monuments which will be worthy of swami Vivekananda and will be capable of bringing into fruition his grand vision of future India”.

So VK a spiritually oriented service mission started in 1972 as the living memorial of swami Vivekananda comprising of cadre of dedicated Jeevanbratis, Sevabrati, Vanaprasti and thousands of local karyakartas as well as lacks of patrons, well-wishers and publication subscribers. It is primarily guided by the idea to serve man as god and to guide by national ideals. For actualizing vision of swami Vivekananda, the Kendra has more than 225 branches and centre around various service activities [6]. Perhaps with this started the politics of Kendra, which invoke the name of Vivekananda directly to justify many activities. It further relegated the task to take up the idea of Kendra to Eknath Ranade and mould it in his own way. However, Eknath's background was well known to us. He was the author of the book “Swami Vivekananda's Rousing Call to Hindu Nation”, which see Vivekananda as a propagator of regenerated Bharata or a Hindu Nation [7]. It would be interesting to see the other attributes of the founder of Kendra, which might have molded activities of Kendra accordingly. Here is a brief life sketch of the founder of Kendra:

19.11.1914: Born at Timala, Amrabati district of maharashtra.

1920: Came to Nagpur: had primary education in Prardanavispura School

1926: Joined RSS as Swayam Sevak

1932: Passed matriculation from new English high school, Nagpur.

1938: Passed B.A (HONS) in philosophy (equal to M.A)

1938: Became a Pracharak of RSS.

1946: Passed LLB FROM law college, Jabalpur. Pranta pracharak of mahakosala.

1948: Went underground during the bad of RSS. Also work from the lifting the ban. 1949: Was in jail for about a month.

1950: Kshetra pracharak for poorvanchal comprising Bengal, Orissa and Assam. Did outstanding work for the refugee coming from Pakistan by establishing “vastuhara sahayata samiti”

1953: Akhil bhartiya prachar pramukh

1955: Sarkaryabahak, general secretary of RSS

1962: All India bauhik pramukh of RSS

1963: Wrote the book rousing call to Hindu nation.

18-11:1963: organizing secretary of rock memorial committee

1972: Founded Vivekananda Kendra- a spiritually oriented service mission.

1973: Founded editor yuva bharti, Kendra bharti, Kendra patrika and brahmabadini.

1975: General secretary Vivekananda Kendra

1978: President Vivekananda Kendra

1282: President Vivekananda Kendra international

22.08 82.: Nirvana at madras

23.08 82: cremated at Vivekanandapuram, Kanyakumari.

It is obvious from the life history of Eknath Ranade that he was a top functionary of RSS. And it is quite natural to have some RSS influence over Kendra. Perhaps the idea of Service and Glorious Bharata carries the legacy of RSS and injected the same in Vivekananda Kendra through Eknath Ranade. Nevertheless, in common view there is nothing wrong in propagating Glorious Bharat and Service concept if carried out with noble purpose without countering “the

other”. Further it will be clear when we will proceed to the various activities of the Kendra and its co-relation with Vivekananda. As we have seen the mission of the Kendra is derived from the idea of the Swami, so it seeks an explanation. It has primarily two missions:

1. **Man Making**

2. **Nation Building**

Probably the two missions is also the mission of Rastriya Swayam Sevak Sangh. Golwarkar keep insisting the two as the basic ideal. What ever the case it may be, Vivekananda Kendra accomplishes this twin purpose as their mantra. Taking inspiration from the famous statement of swami Vivekananda, VK tries to accomplish two missions. The first one is man making and the second one is nation building. It quotes swami Vivekananda as;

“Each nation has a destiny to fulfill, each nation has a message to deliver, and each nation has a mission to accomplish. Therefore from very start, we must understand the mission of our own race, the destiny it has to fulfill, and the place it has to acquire in the march of nation, the note it has to contribute to the harmony of races.”

Thus VK aims at transforming our people's inherent godwardness into right spiritual urge to serve god in man, and to canalized the spiritual fervour thus released, to work of national reconstruction. From here starts the idea of nation building and man making. But it is always a question what type of nation and man Kendra wants to make. Is it Seminal with the view of Vivekananda?

This nation building goes global and it is thought to propagate the Indian mission to the abroad. From here starts the idea of Vivekananda Kendra International. This can be called the third phase of the expansion if Rock Memorial.

### **VK International: Where Kendra Cross the boarder**

Vivekananda Kendra international is the third phase enumeration. The first phase was the rock memorial phase, the second one is the Vivekananda Kendra phase and the third one is the Vivekananda international. This international was inaugurated in 2003 and launched in 1982. It is an initiative for the inter- civilization harmony through dialogue and understanding for building international understanding through Indian wisdom, there by promoting India cause at international level. Vivekananda Kendra is a humble but a determined beginning of a great national mission for global understanding. It follows the words of swami Vivekananda who says;

“Everything looks propitious and Indian thought, philosophical and spiritual, must once more to grow over and conquer the world”.

For the International as a great historian said “western begins must have Indian end”. The western begins has heralded centuries of clashes and conflicts, the Indian mission at the global level is the only alternative. VKI emphasis to be global in perspective and in scale of operations, supported by an extensive infrastructure manned by dedicated workforce of proven intellectual competence and integrity. It also dreams of allowing India to promote the greatness of its culture and wisdom and Endeavour the challenges we are facing in the global scale. Provided by the basics of the teaching of swami Vivekananda VKI provides a new international platform to the Indian voice, by creating awareness about Indian philosophy and wisdom towards propagating global peace and harmony and preventing the

predicated clashes among civilizations. It thoroughly derives its inspiration from Vivekananda and for the Kendra shook the world with Indian thought, Hinduism and Spirituality. The creation of this international show the quest of Kendra to sphere head a global influence making other know about the idea Vivekananda.

Beside this international Vivekananda Kendra has a pan Indian presence. It has various branches all over India and it is sought to actualize the practical mission of Vivekananda. Indeed, this center plays a decisive role in propagating the inherent ideology of Kendra.

### **Vivekananda Kendra Centers**

The head quarter of Vivekananda Kendra is situated at Kanyakumari. This is called Vivekanandapuram. Beside this there are many centers through which it operates. Its headquarters also located regionally. In north there are six centers, including Delhi, Lucknow, Simla, Jodhpur and Bhilwara. In north east there are seven headquarters situated respectively at Dibrugarh, Guwahati, Tinsukia, Numaligarh, Karbi Anglong, Tezpur and Jorhat. In the southern part there are ten headquarters, which includes Kanya Kumari, Kodungllur, Toothukoodi, Chennai, Valliyoor, Kallabalu, Madurai, Bangalore, Rameswaram and Hyderabad. In the eastern part of India there are six head centre which includes kolkata, Bhubaneswar, port blare, Birbhum, Balasore and keonjhar. In the western side there are ten head centers which include Mumbai, pune, Solapur, Nasik, Nagpur, Pimpalad, Satara, Malegaon, Vadodara and Ahmedabad. In the centre there are four centers including Gwalior, Bhopal, Jabalpur and Indore.

Like the Hindutva's representation of Vivekananda, Kendra also woos youth in the name of Vivekananda. The following are the few examples where the quotations of the Swami are used to inspire the youth in the name of Vivekananda.

"Let us proclaim to every soul...- Arise, awake and stop not till the goal is reached. Arise, Awake from hypnotism of this weakness. None is really weak; the soul is infinite, omnipotent and omniscient. Stand up, assert yourself, proclaim the GOD within you, do not deny him!"

"Too much of inactivity, too much of weakness, too much of hypnotism, has been & is upon our race. O ye modern Hindus, de-hypnotize yourselves."

"The way to do that is found in your own sacred books. Teach yourself, teach everyone his real nature, call upon the sleeping should and see how it awakes. Power will come, glory will come, goodness will come, purity will come, and everything that is excellent will come when this sleeping soul is roused to self-conscious activity."

"If there is anything in the Gita that I like, it is these verses, coming out strong as the very gist, the very essence, of Krishna's teaching "He who sees the supreme Lord dwelling alike in all beings, the Imperishable in the things that perish, he sees indeed. For seeing the Lord as the same, everywhere present, he does not destroy the self by the self, and thus he goes to the highest goal."

The above stanza is enough to suggest what actually the Kendra wants from the youth. Thus Kendra proposed many activities for the youth. It conducts classes and camps. This training are said to be more as value education. But the major activities of the Kendra show that these are divided into three groups.

### **Activities of Vivekananda Kendra**

Vivekananda Kendra had adopted the methodology of regularly conducting classes. Those classes are of three types;

1. Yoga Varga
2. Swadhyay Varga
3. Samskar Varga

This all has been undertaken to actualize the vision of swami Vivekananda's idea of "Jagatguru Bharat". Which some time falls under the purview of nation and nationalism. Kendra too organizes three stages of Karyakarta Prasikshana Sibir to induct new workers to its cadres. Beside number of camps like yoga sibir, spiritual retreat, Maitri Sibir, personality development sibir are also organized at different places. There are many projects being undertaken by the Kendra.

### **Yoga Varga**

The vision of swami Vivekananda was to rebuild mother Bharat in tune with her personality enshrined in yoga and spiritual lore. Yoga of swami Vivekananda is integral and it is spiritual. It is the holistic concept which rises, man is potentially divine.

This has been adopted by VK. The founder of Vivekananda Kendra thus tried to train the Karyakartas to learn a great deal of organizational skill and patriotic favor. This holistic vision of Hindu nation enunciated by swami Vivekananda, in tune with emerging trends of popularity of yoga gave a direction to the Kendra to make yoga their core element. The ideology of this was to integrate the individual with society. To channelise the energy of organized collective life for productive nation building work.

Its vision is to solve the body-mind complexity and allow fulfilling the inner aspiration, which would be supreme act of service.

### **Swadhyay Varga**

It tries to transform the peoples inherent god-wardens into the right spiritual urge rising out of the teaching of the Upanishads like "each soul is potentially divine", faiths in god, in turn means faith in faith in one self's that is ones personality to rise to divine heights. These spiritual fervors finally can be converted for national reconstruction. Its objectives is coming, thinking and working together for national resurgence. It too aims at clarifying thoughts in national perspective. It is to know about our achievement and potentiality as nation. This is primarily focused on the Karma yoga slokas of Bhagwat Gita. This tries to aim at making strong man, who has taken unshakable interest in themselves thus enabling each of us to work for the rebuilding of this Hindu nation. This is to foster the ideal social order in this ancient land. Thus it takes inspiration from omkar, bharat Mata, swami Vivekananda and the founder of Kendra.

### **Samskar Varga**

Children are not the vessels to be filled; they are lamp to be lit. These words of swami Chinmayananda have been taken by VK. According to it the aim of Samskar Varga is to instill the love for the country. This is further to create urge to strive for excellence in all acts. It has again to bring out latent talents. Overall strive for five-fold personality development.

The above training, which per say inject the idea of the Kendra tries to build the people who can bind with them and with their ideology. Beside this, the Kendra undertakes many project and service activities. This all carries the prefix of Vivekananda. Kendra over a period of time has entered into the various walks of life through these activities. These seem very important to mention them for the sake of are clarification as to what kinds of project they are undertaking and how it link itself to swami Vivekananda vision.

### Projects and other activities

**Vivekananda Kendra runs many projects.** These project works on the auspices of the supervision of the Kendra. It is better to have a glance over on the types of project they undertake.

- A) Vivekananda Kendra Prishikshan VA seva prakalpa** tries to train the workers of Vivekananda Kendra. It also encourages them to carry out some service activities for the local people. It organizes camps, Balwadis, and health centre and boys hostel. This projects works on pimped and Nasik of Maharashtra.
- B) Vivekananda Kendra skill training project** enhance the opportunity learn tailoring and other vocational training for rural boys and girls. It also performs the activities like Balwadis, knitting and weaving. It is located at Kallabalu of Karnataka. It argues that Indian women can solve their problem in their own way. It describes the connotation of Indian women as motherliness, hard worker, sacrifice, responsible etc. it tries to uphold the grand ideal of Hindu womanhood. Thus VK started this project in 1997 to make women economically independent. In this traing center beside this they teach primary reading, writing, cooking, health, hygiene, storytelling, patriotic songs are also taught. This trading center also teaches yoga and martial art for confidence development.
- C) Vivekananda Kendra Vidyalaya** have a twin objective, the first one is the man making and the second is the nation building. It runs residential and non-residential schools. This is located at various places. In Arunachal Pradesh there are 26 Vidhayalaya where as in Assam there are 14, in Nagaland 1, Andaman's 9, Karnataka one and Tamilnadu has two Vidyalaya. There are many making education being given at 51 Vidyalaya for tribal and rural children in Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Assam, Andaman, Tamilnadu and Karnataka. It has proximately accommodated 16,000 Banavasi students and hostel for them. By this VK invites young teacher to contribute to this Gyana Yagna.
- D) Vivekananda Kendra Arun Jyoti project** tries to possess development trough culture. It is located at Arunachal Pradesh. Its activities include Anoupacharik Siksha Manch, Swathya Siksha Manch, Yuva Manch, Mahila Manch and Sanskritik Manch.
- E) Vivekananda institute of culture** brings forth the unique attributes of the north-east and nourish the commonalities. It organizes workshop, seminar,

documentation, projects, lecture series, study circle and reference library. It locates at Guwahati and Arunachal Pradesh. It has been established with a purpose to discover the cultural continuity of the north eastern state with rest of India.

- F) Natural resource development projects** aims at the sustainable development of society. It gives more trace on cost-effective housing, water management, organic farming, indigenous health system and renewable energy. This one is locate at Kanyakumari. This is called the world renowned project by Vivekananda Kendra. Under this project four types of activities are undertaken;
- water shed management
  - rural housing
  - indigenous medicines
  - farming

Gramodaya Darsan Park of Kanyakumari is one of the examples of this.

- G) Vivekananda Kendra rural welfare project** is with socio-economic intend. It tries to aimed at the all-round development of the tribal women. Its activities includes training cum production center in weaving, tailoring, embroidery, different agro based training and demonstration, a day scholar school and awareness camps. It is located at khatkhathi of Assam. Kendra has adopted 5 southern district of Tamil Nadu namely Kanyakumari, Tirunelveli, Virudhu Nagar, Thoothukuddy and Ramachandrapuram for the all-round economic development of man, woman and children of this backward area. As a part of this Kendra has 75 Balwadis for 2000 children. Its weekly Bal Samskar Varga are held 200 places attended by 7000 children. It also organizes the cultural competitions where last year 27.000 children participated out of 1800 school.
- H) Vivekananda Kendra medical research foundation** provides the medical services. This is though Vivekananda Kendra (NRL) hospitals. Its treatment based on the modern information technology. It has the medical camps at thirteen villages regularly. The VK hospital of pulling provides the mobile medical service. This is located at Assam and Arunachal Pradesh. The Numaligarh refinery complex of Assam situates the VK-NRL hospital. This 40 bedded hospital well equipped one not only caters to the need of 4000 staff but attend the 13 surrounding villages.
- I) VK Prakasan Trust** publishes books to spread the noble thoughts of swami Vivekananda and healthy literature to inspire youth with message. This publication includes in English, Hindi, Marathi, Gujarat, Assamese and Tamil. This trust can be located at Chennai, Jodhpur, pune, palitana and Guwahati. This publications includes as-
- Rousing call to Hindu nation by Eknath Ji Ranade
  - India's contributions to world thought and literature, a master piece by eminent scholar – a reference manual for research and history.

- Dheyeya marga which deals with the meaning of Kendra prayer.
- Heartbeat of Hindu nation by P. Parameswaran.
- Gramodaya which explain the permanent exhibition on sustainable development- living intone with nature.
- India wake up by Eknath ji Ranade
- Katha Vivekananda Charya in Marathi
- Sacred earth, Sadhna of service, story of rock memorial by Eknath ji Ranade.
- Surya Namaskar and Yoga books.

**J) VK Vedic Vision Foundation** emphases on creating a network of thinkers and scholars of Vedic studies. It conducts the research on Vedic knowledge and supporting Vedic scholars. It encourages dissemination of Vedic knowledge in order to practice the Vedic truth in family. Its activities include the publications, yoga, Pranayam courses, and personality development camps, celebrations, Satsangs and spiritual discourse. It is located at Kodungallur of Kerla. It gives trace on translating Vedic vision of the Risis in the day to day life and making it practical the message swami Vivekananda gave to all.

**K) Vivekananda Kendra international** loves to take initiative of harmony between civilization through dialogue and discussion. It organizes conferences, seminar and study circle. Its head office is located at New Delhi.

**The activities carried out by all projects and Centre includes the followings.**

1. Over 45 Vidyalaya for tribal and rural children in Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Assam, Andaman, Tamilnadu and Karnataka.
2. Hotel for Banavasi children.
3. 150 Balwadis all over the country.
4. Running the non-formal school for preservation of Vedic vidyas.
5. Personality development camps for the children.
6. Youth camps to motivate them to lead purposeful life.
7. Cultural examination to increase the awareness in students about the greatness as well as relevance of Indian culture.
8. Non-formal education through audio-visuals.
9. Matru-sammelan and women awareness camps for tribal women to motivate them to lead purposeful life.
10. Deep Pooja and Shiva Pooja.
11. Vocational training in Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Karnataka and Tamilnadu.
12. Amrita surabhi daily offering of handful rice by women, which is collected to feed around 12,000 poor children.
13. Residential spiritual retreat of seven days duration.
14. Residential yoga sibir of fifteen days duration.
15. Promotion of the natural gas like bio gas, building materials, herbal medicines.
16. Training masons, farmers etc. in appropriate rural technology.
17. Seminar and lecture series in Vedic studies and publishing of Vedic literature.
18. Seminar, workshops and symposium to create awareness in ecology.
19. Seminars and symposiums on traditions of Banavasi communities for their protection and promotion.

20. Hearth care camps including eye checkup and operation.
21. Inter-civilization dialogue and understanding in perspective of Hindu civilization.
22. Research and documentation of traditional customs, rituals of Vanvasi communities.
23. Publishing thought provoking literature through magazines like Yuva Bharati (English monthly), Vivekananda Kendra patrika(English six monthly, thematic),Kendra bharati (Hindi monthly), Vivek vichar (Marathi, for monthly), Vivek vani (Tamil monthly), Jagriti (Assamese, three monthly), vivek sudha (Gujarati, Three monthly) and many other books also.

**Festivals observed by VK**

Vivekananda Kendra observes many festivals. These festivals also observed in other centers too. These are the festivals VK celebrate;

**Guru Purnima**

- This is observed on ashada poornima to inculcate respect and pride towards our forefathers; remembrance of our guru – iswar- to prepare ourselves as an instrument in his hands to do his work with attitude of sadhna. Their objective includes;
  - a) To acquaint with our guru tradition and know more about guru Omkar.
  - b) To reconnect with iswara and to remind our selves and to remind that we are his work.

In this day generally bhajans, lectures, discussions on great Guru Sisya tradition and its contemporary significance has been generally discussed.

**Samartha Bharat Parva**

Swami Vivekananda after wondering all over India, came to Kanyakumari and sat in meditation on 25, 26 and 27 December 1982. Here he felt inspiration to go to parliament of religion. Thus every year from 25<sup>th</sup> December to 12<sup>th</sup> January every year to awaken the national ideal and consciousness among the youth focusing on the strength of the nation, this festival occurs. Its objectives are as follows;

- A. To bring the focus of the youth to the dynamics of the mother land, her great present strength and also her dignity to guide the world.
- B. To spread the message of swami Vivekananda among the public.
- C. To focus on cultural tradition.
- D. To pay homage to all who laid their lives for the protection of motherland.

**Universal Brotherhood Day**

Swami Vivekananda in his lecture at Chicago starting from 11 September gave a call for universal brother hood. He said that man in the earth has continued to too long fanatic about insisting their religion alone was true and other religion was being false no right to exist. He also stressed that as long as it would persist there can be only bloodshed in the name of religion and no brother hood which the religion brings would possible. Swami Vivekananda this call to end sectarianism and bigotry and go to a perfect harmony became the mantra of universal brotherhood day. Its objectives are to;

- A) To bring to focus of our youth to the dynamics of our

motherland

- B) To spread the message of swami Vivekananda among the public.
- C) To focus on cultural tradition.
- D) To pay homage to all who laid their lives for the protection of motherland.

In this day Kendra organizes competitions at school, college, seminars, and group discussions and in depth study of Swamiji's teaching is also happens.

### Gita Jayanti

This is observed on Margasirsh Sukla Ekadasi. Its objectives are-

1. to popularize Gita study for making life purposeful life, for national resurgence
2. And to nourish ourselves with the vision of the risis.

### Sadhana Diwas

This is observed on the day of 19<sup>th</sup> November. This is the birth day of the founder of Vivekananda Kendra. This is to mark respect to that soul and to mark his vision and reorient our dedication to the mission of national resurgence. Sadhna divas have two objectives;

1. To pay homage to the founder of Vivekananda Kendra, Eknath ji Ranade
2. The divine bharaat is destined to guide the world. So in this Iswari Karya of national resurgence Karyakarta is the chosen instrument. When the Karyakarta will work with Sadhabana it becomes their Sadhana.

In this day Kendra organizes the annual meeting of Karyakartas and taking up the responsibilities.

### All India camps

**Vivekananda Kendra organizes all India camps every year.** These camps are two types.

1. spiritual retreat
2. yoga siksha sibir

The duration of the first one is 6 days where as the second one is of 15 days. Spiritual retreat is organized in the month of February and august. It is for the people who are more than forty years of age. The donation for this is 1000/-only. The yoga siksha sibir, organized in the month of June and December. This is exclusively for the people who are more than 18 years of age. The donation for this sibir is 1500/-only. The medium of this sibir is English and Hindi. The syllabus of sibir is as follows;

- A) Yogic relaxation methods, japa and the technique of meditation
- B) Study of yoga darsana
- C) Bhagwat gita
- D) Indian culture
- E) Life and message of great men and women of our country
- F) Chanting of strotas, bhajans, and songs for emotional culture.
- G) Visits to Vivekananda rock memorial, Kanyakumari temple
- H) Visiting/trekking Marutmalai Mountain.
- I) Study and Practice of Yogasana, Pranayama and Kriya

In this sibir the food is simple and vegetarian.

The project and service activities are not the sole

constituency of the Kendra. There are many constituency over which Kendra silently operates and preach its ideology. To protect the ancient Indian culture and cultural places has been the motto for the same from long since. When one enters into the gate of the Kendra Head Quarter of Kanyakumari, a picture of Mother India sitting on the lion holding the saffron flag can be seen. And some other places of Kendra the photos of Vivekananda can be seen hanging on the wall. The other interesting story is that the naming of the dormitory and the guest house. All are named after a holy place of India like Tirupati, Puri, Dhwaraka, Brindaban, Avanti etc. this shows the cultural entrenchment of the Kendra to invoke the cultural and historic symbol of India. This is not one case but there are numerous examples of this.

One can see ample of inspiring quotations of swami Vivekananda, saint Tiruvalluvar and Eknath Ranade inside the Kendra premises. These quotations are all selective and inspirational. This all are related to energize India and its potential. This all is through religion, spirituality and idea of service. This invocation is being proved in another case, through exhibitions. Kendra organizes many exhibitions, some are permanent and some are temporary. It also follows the same legacy of invoking India and Indian Culture through Vivekananda. Often we see the use of Spirituality and Science of ancient India to give it legitimacy of ancient Bharat. It will be clear after discussing some of them briefly.

### Gramodaya Park

This is located on the right corner of Kendra. This gives trace to the holistic approach to life. This is developed by the idea of swami Vivekananda who said that nation lives in cottage and relies on the upliftment of the masses. Thus, this park emphasis on the mutual harmony and interconnected tendency of human being with nature and animal. So it tries to build that technological recourse which will be able to take every one among us without giving a negative impact. So there is a river and drain management system within it. It has also got the presidential award for this. It gives trace on how to manage the water before going to sea. Apart from this have also sixty herbal planets. It believes in sustainable agriculture. This can last for many years. The medicine produced from here goes to the dispensary. So the bharaat Gramodaya Park put here to show the success stories of ideal management of our water and other recourses. So that the mother earth can nourish and bharaatmata can be cherished by humanity for her reverence to nature as well as development through culture. This Gramodaya Park has some direct reference with the idea of Vivekananda. According to an official of the park, Vivekananda wanted that if India will rise it will rise from villages and cottages keeping perfect feet to feet with the nature. The consequence of that idea is a result of the Gramodaya Park, he added.

### Swami Vivekananda pictorial exhibition

This exhibition is situated in the mid campus of Vivekanandapuram. It is sponsored by many individuals, institutions, charity trust, banks and so on. This is very nicely maintained and entry for this is made through tickets. First few pictures of this exhibition depict the glory of India. It shows the picture of Kabir, Nanak, Shankara, Gargi, Maitree, Nimbarka etc. But it exclusively deals with the life

of swami Vivekananda. At last it shows the toleration and activities of the Kendra.

### **Maha Ganapati Temple**

There is a temple of lord Ganapati after few meters of Kendra entrance. It is believed that every odd would be vanished by the mercy of Sri Ganesha. I think as the founder of Kendra is from Maharashtra, so forth his love for the deity is obvious. There is also a matru mandir nearby this temple. This matru mandir is only for the women dedicated.

### **Gangotri Exhibition**

It is an exhibition which is organized in the honour of Eknath Ranade. It **portrays** the exhibit talent and labour that man put for the work of rock memorial and Kendra. Here we can see the back ground and life stretch of Eknath Ranade. This exhibition further portrays the photograph of Golwalkar and Hedgewar, from whom the founder took the inspiration. In his personal room he has the photo of guruji, Vivekananda and lord Ganesha. This exhibition has the letters, correspondence, dress, and the signatures of Members of parliaments who supported for a rock memorial. The rare photographs of eminent peoples visit is also there. This exhibition is solely in the honour of him. His shirt, kurta, court, jacket all are still there for the visitor.

### **Samartha Bharata Parva**

There was a small exhibition inside the chitrakoot hall of Kendra, which is called samartha bharata parva. This shows the contemporary achievement of India through science and technology. Here I saw the photo of Chandrayan. The achievement of India's space mission. The achievements of sunita William, Kalpana chawla, A.P.J Abdul Kalam were also there.

### **Wondering Monk Exhibition**

This exhibition is situated outside the premises of Kendra. But it maintains and a part of Kendra. This exhibition depicts the years of Vivekananda who spend most of his time as a wondering monk before leaving for America. This becomes more useful because his wondering monk phase ends at Kanyakumari. Where he supposed to enlighten himself and knew about the past, present and future of India. It depicts how the all India tour of Vivekananda full with the quest to know India and its people. It also depicts various stories of Vivekananda during his parivrajaka days.

### **Jeevan Bratee: life blood of the Kendra**

One needs the dedicated workers to actualize this various activities Kendra proposed to do. So this full time worker helps in shaping and sharing the mission of Kendra. So vivekananda Kendra calls upon the inspiring people to join the Kendra. It questions us, whether we are among the hundreds thousands of Swami Vivekananda. It finally says we are one among those who swami had in mind for awakening our people to the mission of our motherland. It quotes swami, where he says; "a hundred thousand man and women, fired with the zeal of holiness, fortified with eternal faith in the lord, and never to lions courage by their sympathy for poor and the down trodden, will go over to the length and breadth of the land, preaching the gospel of salvation, the gospel of help, the gospel of social raising up, the gospel of equality."

It by this appeal that

"Come; dedicate yourself for the service of nation as a full time worker of VK."

If one does not have family responsibility and some is interested in the ideal choice for the mission swami had placed before. They are welcome to join the Kendra. Thus for the Kendra, it is not a career – but a mission.

### **Vivekananda Kendra and Vivekananda: an appraisal**

So far it is clear to us that Vivekananda Kendra carries many projects, service activities, cultural functions and festival in the name of Vivekananda. It also argues that, the inspiration of Vivekananda works as an instigating wheel behind Vivekananda Kendra. We need to see that how far Kendra is able to succeed in actualizing the vision of Vivekananda, in whose footprints the Kendra is being build. Of course, this is the first instance where an institution has been built in the name of Vivekananda to implement his ideas. When there is an attempt to address the dream of Vivekananda, the dream itself has been misunderstood. The attributes are being made to Vivekananda by building an institution to fulfill his dream and vision, scholar say is a strategy to propagate own ideological pack in the name of the legend. This allegation comes close, when we see the way memorial and Kendra was build. The politics of building the memorial through the dictation of RSS is itself not out of controversy. This meteoric love for Vivekananda may not be that sacrosanct as we think but it might have a wider application to institutionalize Vivekananda. The involvement of Hindu Nationalist Organization like RSS created a buzz around the secular intelligentsia and the true lover of Vivekananda. Many of them wanted Vivekananda in and saffron out. For them it is the new strategy of RSS to mobilize support where it is relatively weak through Vivekananda Kendra <sup>[8]</sup>. Thus when we are aware about such facts the character building organization distracts our faith. We think as to what really the Kendra wants. It is a strong organization to fulfill the vision of the Swami or a shuttle organization to fulfill the unfulfilled the RSS progeny. So the fatal flaws of this Organization is that it has the shadow of RSS, it can grow a lot appealing all if disassociate itself from RSS. Independent institution having no preoccupation or back up can attract many intellectuals. For the genuine representation of Vivekananda, Kendra as an organization needs to be objective and value laden to fulfill the Vision of Vivekananda.

Despite the institutional approach to appropriate Vivekananda by the Kendra it seems evaporate enough as to why the Kendra chooses vivekananda? Why not Gandhi, Aurobindo, Tilak or some other sons of India. It is to remember that Gandhi was also the ardent follower of Hindu culture, a man dedicated to the service or the nation. His service goes to extend of serving personality to the harijans or down trodden. We don't see Gandhi's vision in Kendra's work but we very often mark that swami came as handy to Kendra. Establishing an institution in the name of someone needs a perfect understanding of the person concerns. Through vivekananda become a handy to Kendra's mission and activities hence need an examination as to what are the ideas of swami Vivekananda and the idea of the institution crated in the name of vivekananda. It is further interesting to know the convergent and divergent views of the both. So some where it seems Kendra has a preconceived notion and some selective ideas of



Vivekananda were put in to that. Nothing other than Vivekananda can appeal to mass for the ephemeral and invocation or Bharat. . The point here is, why Vivekananda only? Do this institution genuinely fulfill the vision at Vivekananda or propagate own vested interest in the name at the swami. This is indeed a major issue in front of us.

On the other and we can see the commonality in strategy, functions and activities of Kendra with Rastriya Swayam Sevak Sangh. Like RSS, Kendra also lays its emphasis on the seva Sangathan and mobilization at the Hindu community. the idea of seva is central to both Kendra and religions discourse, whereas the seva of regions discourse is interest free the seva of other institutions are for their own community, society of even for its own interest. That's why seva of these institutions are itself exclusive and driven out by some purpose.

Often the question arises what is the need to have Vivekananda Kendra to fulfill the unfulfilled vision of Vivekananda as we know Ramakrishna math and mission was enough to carry the vision of Sri Ramakrishna Vivekananda ideal. Unlike Vivekananda Kendra, Ramakrishna math gives and overall evaluation of Vivekananda starting from philosophy, literature, nation, religion and Indian situation. This input open up the boundary of discussion. Of course it is often accused or not beings critical to Vivekananda philosophy. This hagiographic account really helps us to provide a base for further discussions. Surprisingly Ramakrishna mission also takes up seva, service and sangathan. In 1889 Vivekananda himself serve the plague victims and that trend still goes on. So for a common man it reminds us as a pertinent questions that, why Kendra in spite of the presence of Ramakrishna math?

Somewhere other when we proceed further we see polar difference between Vivekananda's idea and Kendra's idea. Whereas Vivekananda talked about a composite plural Indian society, Kendra lays its stress upon the idea of Hindu nation. Vivekananda did not believe seva, puja or sangathan to confront with some other institutions or some other faith. The church of Kanyakumari and Kendra's confrontation is already pointed out. Of course, Vivekananda did not want that glorious Bharat born out or confrontation with other faith of religion. He was a man for tolerance, openness, nonsectarian and a true Hindu<sup>[9]</sup>.

Even the life workers Vivekananda Kendra doesn't have much knowledge about Vivekananda. The soul of Kendra-the bratees even doesn't have the idea about the mission and vision of Vivekananda. How can they carry the mission forward if they do not have much idea about swami's ideal? My interviews with many Bratees make it clear. The only thing the Bratees know that he was a Hindu protagonist and immensely filled with the spirit or nationalism and patriotism<sup>[10]</sup>.

However, some where we have to give credit to Kendra for its scientific and some of the secular character. The NARDEEP projects, Yoga, spiritual training, rural development, natural resources management are the part of that process. What can be said here is that development, self-development, yoga, physical fitness and spiritual development are the essential characteristics of every society and if Kendra is professing that without any other pre condition or ideological back round than it should be appreciated. But I think the seva and yoga should not result in masculinity in the name of man making. The

development projects for rural area should not be used for vote bank or for a narrow purpose. Whereas spirituality should not be narrow down as material vs. spiritual, showing the superiority of spiritualism, rejecting the west as material and accepting east as spiritual. Development self-development and spiritual development should be used for the higher ideas like "Basudeva Kutumbakam" or world as a family. This should not be any way used symbolically, silently and strategically to gain the narrow interest.

Scholars even reject the training process and education system of the Kendra. It is being seen a number of Vivekananda Kendra vidyalaya, balbadis and training camps for youth established by the Kendra. But when we see the varga training like samskar, swyadhya and yoga, where the concept like Hindu nation, glorious nations etc are taught. The Kendra runs many schools for vananvasi and rural children. It impacts a hindutva ideal in that area as j kuruchavira refers. For him these schools have earned reputation and often they are favored over those Christian missionaries' schools. It has even entered into the tribal and north east areas. In the north eastern states the members of schools are rising. This is perhaps to protect the indigenous culture imparts value education based on the ideas of sanatana dharma. This opening up schools and the entrenchment in to the tribal society is also seen by many to encounter the missionaries and their conversion. Vivekananda Kendra institute of culture, Guwahati and Arun Jyoti project of Arunachal Pradesh aims to keeps the cultural continuity of north east and development of Arunachal respectively<sup>[11]</sup>.

Glance on the publications and periodicals of Kendra can teach a good lesson about Kendra's deals. It is most of the time based on the cultural ethos of India. Some books deals with Vivekananda which describe the swami the same as hindutva pictures. Ranades "rousing call for Hindu nation" and of "India wake up" are two such book. A recent publication has been bought out on Christianity. Even the special edition of Kendra Patrika was devoted to Golwalkar, the second Sarasangha Chalak of RSS. These publications hardly deals with India's development or Vivekananda philosophy rather used it for own ideological mouth piece. This type of publication seems very exclusive. Which hardly catch the inherent logic of Vivekananda's philosophy? So the so called Gyana Yagna by the Kendra is a subverted Gyana Yoga.

The Kendra talks about glorious Bharat which means a glorious Indian nation. This theory pre-supposes through the ancient ideals like Vedic vision and spirituality. Unfortunately the nation means to the Kendra a Hindu nation, yoga a Hindu way and spirituality, a manifestation of the divine Bharat. If we are going through such types of meaning than where is the question of genuine Hinduism. That's why, these types of self-created Gyana seems very exclusive.

The festival s Kendra observes are all related to the purpose of Kendra's mission. But the appeal of the leader to the workers and Bratees in this festival needs a special mention. On Geeta Jayanti, the importance to Hindu family festivals and philosophy is sought. It lays its emphasis on karma yoga which gives more emphasis on duty towards family society and nation. So on the eve of Gita Jayanti it is necessary for us to do justice to our motherland. According to Vivekananda, Kendra Quotes:

"I do not merely see in to the future nor do I care to see/.

But one vision I see clear as life before me that the ancient mother has awakened once more sitting on her throne rejected more glorious than ever. Proclaim her to the entire world with the voice of peace and benediction”

So for Kendra, duty to the nation means Hindu nation and swami is the propagator of that divine theory. Even other festivals also seek the same appeal do whatever your founder says but in the name of Vivekananda. Here Vivekananda becomes a scapegoat or a “Balika Bakra” (a similar Hindi analogy) in the hand of an institution for the interest of the founder. This indeed should not happen in a democratic India. We should not use any legendary, great pan Indian figure for our own sake. Vivekananda Kendra in any way should not represent Vivekananda in that way what he is not or he does not possess. Let hope for a more genuine Vivekananda comes in for the genuine interest and a true representation and nonpartisan approach can only help us in this regard.

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