

Relevance of Swami Vivekananda's Philosophy of Education in 21st century: A Critical Study

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Abstract: In this writing, we will focus on Swami Vivekananda's views on the Philosophy of Education and its relevance in modern life. According to Vivekananda, education does not mean the mass of information that is forcefully inserted into a child's mind. For him, education is the manifestation of perfection already in man. Indian nationalism and spiritualism were the basic foundations of his philosophy of education and philosophy of Vedānta and Upaniṣads. He was against the contemporary educational system; he turned men into slaves, capable of being slaves and nothing else. He stressed that the purpose of education is the construction of life, the formation of man and character, and he also affirmed that knowledge without culture is only superficial. The mind is full of facts before it knows how to think. According to him, selfdevelopment, Sadharma realization, freedom of growth and character building are the goals of education. For him, education means the process by which character is formed, mental strength is increased and the intellect is refined, so that one can stand on one's own legs. True education is that which prepares man for the struggle of existence. It prepares man for social service and develops his character. He stressed that an education that develops character, mental faculties and intelligence gives self-confidence and self-confidence among individuals. Swami Vivekananda emphasized education for democracy and national development. Education was a powerful tool for achieving these developmental qualities in people. He wants to make the individual recognize his cultural heritage and fight for life, for which he has emphasized that education is the right choice for the imminent life of the human being. Vivekananda not only possessed high ideals of education, but also developed a strong system of ideals, as it was achieved.

Keywords: Self-confidence, man-making, education, character, building, humanism, and sympathy.

Introduction

Swami Vivekananda believes that education is not information of knowledge to be forced into a child's mind. In his words: "*Education is the manifestation of perfection already in man.*"¹ He illustrates that libraries could be the greatest saints in the world and encyclopedias have become truth seers and rishis. He further stated that education was not about getting a lot of information; it would be an undigested material of our brain. A good quality education must have the construction of life, the formation of man, the construction of character and the assimilation of ideas. This would help ordinary people prepare for the struggle of life. The main essence of his philosophy of life is to become fearless through struggle and to serve humanity with peace. He wants to make an individual without fear of enemies, face all challenges with courage and confidence without any repression. Synthesizing the idealistic philosophy of the West and the creative philosophy of the ancient Hindu Dharma, he brought glory and grandeur to the Hindu way of life.

¹ Vivekananda, Swami. The Complete Works. Kolkata: Advaita Ashrama, 2003, p. IV.358.

Now we discuss about the Vivekananda's philosophy of education. *"Real education is that which enables one to stand on one's own legs."*² Education makes man for social service, to develop his character and ultimately infuses him with the spirit and courage of a lion. To get a degree is not an education; the correct education must be seen on the basis of the character, mental abilities, intelligence and inculcation, self-confidence and self-confidence in individuals. Vivekananda stressed that all the knowledge we get from the mundane or spiritual is embedded in the human mind. It was covered in a veil of darkness and ignorance. Education is a tool to get rid of darkness and ignorance, after getting education, knowledge will shine dazzlingly. Teaching and learning are the only form of process. The teacher guides, suggests, points and helps the student. Self-learning and self-knowledge are true education. The teacher does nothing but motivates and encourages students to discover the hidden treasure of knowledge that lies dormant within him. He condemned and rejected book learning and mechanical instruction. Condemning theoretical and academic education, he spoke with emphasis in favor of practical and experimental education. He warned his compatriots to be practical in all spheres of work. The whole country has been ruined by mass theories.

According to Swamiji, the means of education is love. Love and character building are the best means of education. Love is the best inspiration for building character. Love in the mind of the educator is the true source of his influence on the educated. True education gives growth and expansion of the personality. He wanted education for integral human development to be the primary vision. *"Character, efficiency and humanism should be the aim of all education. Vivekananda strongly pleaded that development of character through the service of his fellowmen, the utilization of his talents for ensuring the happiness and welfare of the millions of his less fortunate fellow-citizens should be the aim of the education."*³ The child must be educated through love; it generates feelings of companionship and love for the human being. Education must help the individual to recognize their cultural heritage and to use it in their struggle for life. Education is a life-long process towards the full development of the human personality, self-discovery, self-improvement, self-awareness and self-expression.

Swamiji realizes that humanity is going through a crisis. The enormous emphasis on scientific and mechanical life forms is rapidly reducing man to the state of a machine. Moral and religious values are undermined. The fundamental principles of civilization are ignored. Conflicts of ideas, customs and habits permeate the environment. Contempt for all that is old is the fashion of the day. Faced with this situation, Vivekananda seeks solutions to all these social and global evils through education. Vivekananda emphasized such education through which moral values can be developed among students so that they can lead their life morally. They can decide what is right or wrong; what is justice or injustice.

Vivekananda believes that if we can make a student a good human being, the development of moral values within him is the primary task of education. According to Vivekananda, morality is the important aspect of personality. To do this, he emphasized religious education. Swami Vivekananda believed in the liberal concept of religion. The essential elements of all religions are the same. No religion is inferior to another religion. Man must follow an attitude of respect for every religion. According to Swami Vivekananda, love is the highest goal of religion. Man must be imbued with love for all and hatred for no one.

² Ibid., p. VII. 147-48.

³ Johri, Pradeep Kumar, Educational Thought, New Delhi: Anmol Publications PVT. LTD., 2005, p. 238.

Aims of education

Vivekananda wanted a comprehensive development of education of the heart and mind, to strengthen national character and consciousness, to aid in the cultivation of strength and energy, to nourish the brain and intellect, and to arouse feelings of kindness and sympathy. He strongly stated: *“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. What we need is to study, independent of foreign control, different branches of the knowledge that is our own and with it the English language and Western science; we need technical education and all else that will develop industries. So that men, instead of seeking for service, may earn enough to provide for them and save against a rainy day. The end of all education, all training, should be man-making. The end and aim of all training is to make the man grow. The training, by which the current and expression of will are brought under control and become fruitful, is called education. What our country now wants are muscles of iron and a nerve of steel, gigantic wills which nothing can resist, which can penetrate into the mysteries and secrets of the universe and will accomplish their purpose in any fashion, even if it means going down to the bottom of the ocean, meeting death face to face. It is a man-making religion that we want. It is man-making theories that we want. It is man-making education all round that we want.”*⁴

According to him, education is a process in which young minds will receive strength, energy and vigorous character. On the way to achieving this process, the individual will shape himself from her life. *“All knowledge and all powers are within. What we call power; secrets of nature and force are all within. All knowledge comes from the human soul. Man manifests knowledge, discovers it with himself, which is pre-existing through eternity.”*⁵ Education is a process of formation of man and of the nation. It is the process that awakens the sleeping soul to self-conscious activity. It will become a powerful tool for achieving the qualities of development among people. The main goal of education is to achieve total perfection already present in a

child. According to Vivekananda, all material and spiritual knowledge is already present in the mind of the individual, but it is covered with certain ignorance.

The next aim of education is the physical and mental development of the child. *“For stressing the mental development of the child, Swamiji, wished education to enable the child to stand on his own legs economically rather than becoming a parasite on others.”*⁵ The third goal of education is the development of the child’s character. Emphasize that the child should practice Brahmacharya, which promotes the development of mental, moral and spiritual powers that lead to purity of thought, word and deed. In the fourth purpose of education, religious development stands out. Each individual must seek and develop the religious seed and attain absolute truth or reality.

The idea of Vivekananda on education had a democratic angle. He expressed his deep concern for the mass, *“The education which does not help the common mass of people to equip themselves for the struggle for life, which does not bring out strength of character, a spirit of philanthropy, and the courage of a lion - is it worth the name? Real education is that which enables one to stand on one’s own legs. The education that you are receiving now in schools and colleges is only making you a race of dyspeptics. You are working like machines merely, and living a jelly-fish existence.”*⁷

⁴ Pani, S.P. and Pattnaik, S.K. Vivekananda, Aurobindo and Gandhi on Education, New Delhi: Anmol Publications PVT. LTD., 2006, pp. 59-60. ⁵ Ibid., pp. 57-58.

⁵ Singh, Y.K. Philosophical Foundation of Education, New Delhi: APH Publishing Corporation, 2007, p. 233. ⁷ Pani, S.P. and Pattnaik, S.K. Vivekananda, Aurobindo and Gandhi on Education, New Delhi: Anmol Publications PVT. LTD., 2006, pp. 59-60.

Vivekananda's educational goal had a strong nationalist bias. Rather, he did not criticize the Western educational system; he questioned the adequacy of the Western model in India. The education system in India was based on the India Foundation, supported by the broader argument that every nation should develop an education system based on its own nature, history and civilization.

Vivekananda's basic principles of education

Like Rabindranath Tagore, Swami Vivekananda also prescribed the same ancient spiritual methods of teaching, in which Guru and his disciples lived in close association as a family. The following are the main principles of education.

- Education isn't just for information; rather it should develop character, mental faculties, intelligence and instill self-confidence along with self-sufficiency.
- Education should develop the child physically, mentally and spiritually.
- While granting the degree, technical education was necessary for industrial growth that would lead to the nation's economic prosperity.
- Practicing Brahmacharya is very essential to gain knowledge. Concentration is the key to all knowledge.
- Religious education should be imparted through gentle impressions and good conduct, in preference to books.
- Education must foster spiritual faith, devotion and self-giving in the individual and must encourage full development through service and sacrifice.
- Education should develop character, mental faculties, intelligence and instill self-confidence along with self-reliance.
- All subjects must be included in the curriculum that promotes a child's material and spiritual progress.

Vivekananda's opinion about education

Vivekananda's views on education concern physical education, moral and religious education, the means of education, women's education and education for the weaker sections of society.

Physical Education: Without the knowledge of physical education, self-realization or character formation is not possible. In particular, Vivekananda stressed the value of physical education in the curriculum.

Vivekananda said, *"You will be nearer to Heaven through football than through the study of Gita. You will understand Gita better by your biceps, your muscles a little stronger. You will understand the Upanishads better and the glory of the Atman, when your body stands firm on your feet and you feel yourself as man."*⁶

Medium education: Like Mahatma Gandhi and Rabindranath Tagore, Vivekananda also emphasized education through the mother tongue. In addition to the mother tongue, there must be a common language necessary to keep the country united. Vivekananda appreciated the greatness of Sanskrit which is the source of all Indian languages and a repository of all inherited knowledge; in the absence of this knowledge, it will be impossible to understand Indian culture. It is like a warehouse of millenary legacies, for the development of our society it is necessary that men and women know this language, in addition to the knowledge of the mother tongue.

⁶ Chandra, S.S. and Rajendra K. Sharma, *Philosophy of Education*, New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers and Distributors (p) LTD, 2004, p. 212. ⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 212.

Moral and religious education: Vivekananda believed, “*Religion is the innermost core of education. I do not mean my own or anyone else opinion about religion. Religion is as the rice and everything else, like the curries. Taking only curries causes indigestion and so is the case with taking rice alone.*”⁹ So, religious education is a vital part of a solid curriculum.

Vivekananda considered Gītā, Upaniṣad and Veda the most important curriculum for religious education. For him, religion is self-realization and divinization. It is not only for the development of the individual, but also for the transformation of the total man. True religion cannot be limited to a particular place in time. He supported the unity of world religion. He realized the truth while practicing the religion. Truth is power, lying is weakness. Knowledge is truth, ignorance is a lie. Thus, the truth increases power, courage and energy. It is a giver of light, therefore, necessary for individual and collective well-being. According to Vivekananda, ethics and religion are the same thing. God is always on the side of good. Fighting for good is service to God. Moral and religious education develops self-confidence among young men and women.

Education of masses: Individual development is not a complete development of our nation, so it needs to educate society or ordinary people. Education is not limited only to the wealthy, but also to the poor. Vivekananda emphasizes improving conditions for the masses and supports mass education. Take this mass education as a tool to improve both the individual and society. In this way he exhorted his compatriots to know “*I consider that the great national sin is the neglect of the masses, and that is one of the causes of our downfall. No amount of politics would be of any avail until the masses of India are once more well-educated, well-fed and well-cared for.*”⁷

Man making education: Swami Vivekananda’s educational philosophy is a harmonious synthesis of ancient Indian ideals and modern Western beliefs. He not only emphasized the physical, mental, moral, spiritual and professional development of the child, but he also supported the education of women and the education of the masses. The essential features of Swami Vivekananda’s educational philosophy are idealism, naturalism and pragmatism. In naturalistic visions, he emphasized that true education is possible only through nature and natural propensities. In the form of an idealistic point of view, he insists that the goal of education is to develop the child with moral and spiritual qualities. From the point of view of pragmatists, he stressed the strong emphasis on Western education of technology, trade, industry and science to achieve material prosperity. In short, Swami Vivekananda is an idealist at heart. First he emphasized spiritual development, then material prosperity, then the safety of life and then the solution of the problems of nutrition and clothing of the masses.

Self education: Self education is important for everyone and Self education is the self knowledge, “*education, education, education alone!*”⁸ That is to say, our own being is the best guide in the struggle of our life. If we take an example, the infant stage, the child will have to face many problems or make mistakes in the character formation process. The child will learn a lot from his mistakes. Mistakes are the stepping stones for our progress in character. This progress will require courage and a strong will. A strong will is the sign of a great character that makes men great.

Women education: The education of women is not in the hands of others, the powers are in women. Vivekananda saw women as the embodiment of power and urged men around the world to respect them. He rightly pointed out that unless Indian women secure a respectable place in this country, the nation will never be able to move forward. The important features of her educational program for women are to make them strong, fearless and aware of their chastity and dignity. He insists that men and women are equally competent not only in academic matters, but should also have equal company in the home and in the family. Vivekananda, being an enthusiastic observer, was able to distinguish the difference in the perception of the condition of women in the West and in India. “*The ideal women*

⁷ Siddiqui, M.H. Philosophical and Sociological Perspectives in Education, New Delhi: A.P.H. Publishing Corporation, 2009, p. 74.

⁸ Vivekananda, Swami. The Complete Works. Kolkata: Advaita Ashrama, 2003, p. IV.483.

in India is the mother, the mother first, and the mother last. The word woman calls up to the mind of the Hindu, motherhood; and God is called mother.”⁹

Education for the weaker section of society: Vivekananda has advocated for universal education so that backward people can catch up with others. To elevate the backward grades, he chooses education as a powerful tool for his life process. Therefore, education must be extended to every house in the country, factories, playgrounds and agricultural fields. If the children do not come to school, the teacher has to join them. Two or three educated men should team up, collect all the education paraphernalia, and go to town to educate the children. Therefore, Vivekananda has fostered the education of different sectors of society, rich and poor, young and old, men and women.

Conclusion: So far as our discussion is concerned we can say from the analysis of Vivekananda’s educational scheme, the elevation of the masses is possible only through education in the present life. His views on education shed light on his constructive, practical and integral character in the life of the human being, which continues to be relevant in the daily life of human beings. By engaging in education, he seeks to bring about the moral and spiritual wellbeing and upliftment of humanity, regardless of caste, creed, nationality or age. Through his educational program, we can achieve the strong nation with peace and harmony and without caste or creed. He builds a strong nation for our good. Finally, it is said that Swami Vivekananda’s thoughts and ideas regarding moral values and character formation are of great importance in the field of our current school education. Because, only true school education can motivate our students to think, to do something right or right paths. According to Swami Vivekananda, we can create a society, a nation or a universe, where everything is good, without corruption, without antisocial activities, without immoral activities.

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⁹ Pani, S.P. and Pattnaik, S.K. Vivekananda, Aurobindo and Gandhi on Education, New Delhi: Anmol Publications PVT. LTD., 2006, p. 80.