



## SWAMI VIVEKANAND'S VISION OF EDUCATION

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**Voice of Research**

Vol. 2, Issue 4,

March 2014

ISSN 2277-7733

### Abstract

*Swami Vivekananda (1863 – 1902), a great thinker and reformer of India, embraces education, which for him signifies 'man-making', as the very mission of his life. In this paper, which purports to expound and analyse Vivekananda's views on education, an endeavour has been made to focus on the basic theme of his philosophy, viz. the spiritual unity of the universe. Whether it concerns the goal or aim of education, or its method of approach or its component parts, all his thoughts, we shall observe, stem from this underlying theme of his philosophy which has its moorings in Vedanta.*

**Keywords:** Swami Vivekanand, Education, Vision of Education

The topmost concern of every parent today happens to be their child's education. All decisions of their lives are practically based on whether it would fetch their child better education, or sustain an existing good system that they attend at present. They leave no stone unturned when it is about utilizing their resources, finding more and even more ways to make it comfortable for the child to carry on with his studies. A common thing parents carry in their mind is a sense of void which they felt in their childhood, and thus fiercely dedicate themselves to not let their child face a similar situation. The question, however, remains unanswered in the mind of every parent. Is that why the providing and participating, monitoring enough? Well, it is surely much more than enough when one is concerned about a particular level, the child must achieve academically. Sadly, that has no connection with education. Education is not about academic success or brilliance. Nor is it about intelligence and smartness. It is an undefined entity yet, which we all are striving to provide to the child, believing that we know what it is!

### The Objectives of Education

Swami Vivekananda realized three things are necessary to make every man great, every nation great..

Conviction of the powers of goodness.

Absence of jealousy and suspicion.

Helping all who are trying to be and do good.

Here is an interesting perspective of what education is, and what it is not, in the vision of Swami Vivekananda.

### What is Education?

Education is the manifestation of the perfection already in man. The training by which the current and expression of will is brought under control and become fruitful is called education. Education may be described as a development of faculty, not an accumulation of words, or, as a training of individuals to will rightly and efficiently. Real education is that which enables one to stand on his own legs. If you have assimilated five ideas and made them your life and character, you have more education than any man who has got by heart a whole library. We must have life building, man making, and character making assimilation of ideas.

### What Education is not?

Is it book-learning? No. Is it diverse knowledge? Not even that. Education is not an accumulation of words.... Education is not the collecting of facts... Education is not the amount of information that is put into your brain and runs riot there, undigested all your life. If education were identical with information, the libraries would be the greatest sages in the world and encyclopedias would be the *Rishis*. Education is not filling the mind with a lot of facts. Is that education as a result of which the will, being continuously choked by force through generations, is now well-nigh killed out; is that education under whose sway even the old ideas, let alone the new ones are disappearing one by one; is that education which is slowly making man a machine? The education which does not help the masses to equip themselves for the struggle of life, which does not bring out the strength of character, a spirit of philanthropy, and the courage of a lion — is it worth the name? Well, you consider a man as educated if only he can pass some examinations and deliver good lectures... The present system of education is all wrong. The mind is crammed with facts before it knows how to think. Control of the mind should be taught first. 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. Vivekananda points out that the defect of the present-day education is that it has no definite goal to pursue. A sculptor has a clear idea about what he wants to shape out of the marble block; similarly, a painter knows what he is going to paint. But a teacher, he says, has no clear idea about the goal of his teaching. Swamiji attempts to establish, through his words and deeds, that the end of all education is man making. He prepares the scheme of this man-making education in the light of his overall philosophy of Vedanta. According to Vedanta, the essence of man lies in his soul, which he possesses in addition to his body and mind. In the light of his philosophy, Swamiji defines education as 'the manifestation of the perfection already in man.' The aim of education is to manifest in our lives the perfection, which is the very nature of our inner self. At this stage, man becomes aware of his self as identical with all other selves of the universe, i.e. different selves as manifestations of the same self. Hence education, in



Vivekananda's sense, enables one to comprehend one's self within as the self everywhere. The essential unity of the entire universe is realized through education. Accordingly, man making for Swamiji stands for rousing mans to the awareness of his true self. However, education thus signified does not point towards the development of the soul in isolation from body and mind. We have to remember that basis of Swamiji's philosophy is *Advaita* which preaches unity in diversity. There for, man making for him means a harmonious development of the body, mind and soul. In his scheme of education, Swamiji lays great stress on physical health because a sound mind resides in a sound body. He often quotes the Upanishadic dictum 'nayamatma balahinena labhyah'; i.e. the self cannot be realized by the physically weak. However, along with physical culture, he harps on the need of paying special attention to the culture of the mind. According to Swamiji, the mind of the students has to be controlled and trained through meditation, concentration and practice of ethical purity. All success in any line of work, he emphasizes, is the result of the power of concentration. By way of illustration, he mentions that the chemist in the laboratory concentrates all the powers of his mind and brings them into one focus-the elements to be analyzed-and finds out their secrets. Concentration, which necessarily implies detachment from other things, constitutes a part of *Brahmacharya*, which is one of the guiding mottos of his scheme of education. *Brahmacharya*, in a nutshell, stands for the practice of self-control for securing harmony of the impulses. By his philosophy of education, Swamiji thus brings it home that education is not a mere accumulation of information but a comprehensive training for life. To quote him: 'Education is not the amount of information that is put into your brain and runs riot there undigested, all your life.' Education for him means that process by which character is formed, strength of mind is increased, and intellect is sharpened, as a result of which one can stand on one's own feet.

### Method

Having analyzed the goal or objective of education, the next question that naturally arises is about the method of imparting education. Here again, we note the Vedantic foundation of Swamiji's theory. According to him, knowledge is inherent in every man's soul. What we mean when we say that a man 'knows' is only what he 'discovers' by taking the cover off his own soul. Consequently, he draws our attention to the fact that the task of the teacher is only to help the child to manifest its knowledge by removing the obstacles in its way. In his words: "Thus Vedanta says that within man is all knowledge even in a boy it is so and it requires only an awakening and that much is the work of a teacher." To drive his point home, he refers to the growth of a plant. Just as in the case of a plant, one cannot do anything more than supplying it with water, air and manure while it grows from within its own nature, so is the case with a human child. Vivekananda's method of education resembles the heuristic method of the modern educationists. In this system, the teacher invokes the spirit of inquiry in the pupil who is supposed to find out things for himself under the bias-

free guidance of the teacher. Swamiji lays a lot of emphasis on the environment at home and school for the proper growth of the child. The parents as well as the teachers should inspire the child by the way they live their lives. Swamiji recommends the old institution of gurukula (living with the preceptor) and similar systems for the purpose. In such systems, the students can have the ideal character of the teacher constantly before them, which serves as the role model to follow. Although Swamiji is of the opinion that mother tongue is the right medium for social or mass education, he prescribes the learning of English and Sanskrit also. While English is necessary for mastering Western science and technology, Sanskrit leads one into the depths of our vast store of classics. The implication is that if language does not remain the privilege of a small class of people, social unity will march forward unhampered.

### Field of study

All Round Development: The time-tested values are to be imbibed in the thoughts and lives of the students through the study of the classics like the Ramayana, Mahabharata, Gita, Vedas and Upanishads. This will keep the perennial flow of our spiritual values into the world culture. Education, according to Swamiji, remains incomplete without the teaching of aesthetics or fine arts. He cites Japan as an example of how the combination of art and utility can make a nation great.

Women's Education: There is no chance of the welfare of the world unless the condition of women is improved. It is not possible for a bird to fly on – Swami Vivekananda. Vivekananda strongly reasoned the cause of such degradation of Indian women "The principal reason why our race has so degenerated is that we had no respect for these living images of Shakti. Manu says," Where women are respected, there the gods delight, and where they are not, there all work and efforts come to naught." There is no hope of rise for that family or country where they live in sadness. The Swami was particularly worried about the degradation of women in India. Vivekananda strongly believes that There is a huge difference in the attitude of Indian men and their western counterparts. Indian men believes that the women are born to please them. The real Shakti-worshipper is he who knows that God is the omnipresent force in the universe, and sees in women the manifestation of that force. In America men look upon their women in this light and treat their women as well as can be desired, and hence they are so prosperous, so learned, so free and so energetic. Naturally they grow up believing that they are superior to women and may mistreat their partners later. Why can't we just tell little boys to be more sensitive towards girls rather than feeding their brains about such lame notion. There is no chance for the welfare of the world unless the condition of women is improved. Swami Vivekananda said, "It is very difficult to understand why in this country so much difference is made between men and women, whereas the Vedanta declares that one and the same conscious self is present in all beings. You always criticize the women, but what have you done for their enlistment?" Swamiji reiterates that religion is the innermost core of education. However,



by religion, he does not mean any particular kind of it but its essential character, which is the realization of the divinity already in man. He reminds us time and again that religion does not consist in dogmas or creeds or any set of rituals. To be religious for him means leading life in such a way that we manifest our higher nature, truth, goodness and beauty, in our thoughts, words and deeds. All impulses, thoughts and actions which lead one towards this goal are naturally ennobling and harmonizing, and are ethical and moral in the truest sense. It is in this context that Swamiji's idea of religion, as the basis of education should be understood. We note that in his interpretation, religion and education share the identity of purpose.

Religion Education: Why religion forms the very foundation of education becomes clear in his following words: 'In building up character, in making for everything that is good and great, in bringing peace to others, and peace to one's own self, religion is the highest motive power, and, therefore, ought to be studied from that standpoint. Swamiji believes that if education with its religious core can invigorate man's faith in his divine nature and the infinite potentialities of the human soul, it is sure to help man become strong, yet tolerant and sympathetic. It will also help man to extend his love and good will beyond the communal, national and racial barriers.

It is a misinterpretation of Vivekananda's philosophy of education to think that he has overemphasized the role of spiritual development to the utter neglect of the material side. Vivekananda, in his plan for the regeneration of India, repeatedly presses the need for the eradication of poverty, unemployment and ignorance. He says, We need technical education and all else which may develop industries, so that men, instead of seeking for service, may earn enough to provide for them-selves, and save something against a rainy day. He feels it necessary that India should take from the Western nations all that are good in their civilization. However, just like a person, every nation has its individuality, which should not be destroyed. The individuality of India lies in her spiritual culture. Hence in Swamiji's view, for the development of a balanced nation, we have to combine the dynamism and scientific attitude of the West with the spirituality of our country. The entire educational program should be so planned that it equips the youth to contribute to the material progress of the country as well as to maintaining the supreme worth of India's spiritual heritage.

### Conclusion

The right to education for everyone, guaranteed by the Constitution of India, was Vivekananda's dream, but it is still a far cry from its goal. His idea of continual, or lifelong, education, however, has been adopted in many countries already. Moreover, because of the adoption of continuous education in these countries, our idea of what constitutes success and failure has altered, raising new hope for the weak, underprivileged section of these societies – the very people who for various reasons cannot complete their education when they are young. Vivekananda's cry for the uplift of the downtrodden masses, particularly of the long-neglected women, has evoked a favourable response from different quarters, but

societies tailor education to meet their own needs, thereby often robbing the weak of their freedom to determine their own destiny. Unless radical changes are made in all societies the poor will never be able to raise themselves. This was a major concern of the Swami. It is remarkable the extent to which there are similarities between Vivekananda's thoughts and actions taking place one century ago and the present concerns of UNESCO.

His commitment towards universal values and tolerance, his active identification with humanity as a whole.

The struggle in favor of the poor and destitute, to reduce poverty and to eliminate discrimination against women – reaching the unreached.

His vision of education, science and culture as the essential instruments of human development.

That education should be a lifelong process.

And the need to move away from rote learning.

The exposition and analysis of Vivekananda's scheme of education brings to light its constructive, practical and comprehensive character. He realizes that it is only through education that the uplift of masses is possible. To refer to his own words: 'Traveling through many cities of Europe and observing in them the comforts and education of even the poor people, there was brought to my mind the state of our own poor people and I used to shed tears. When made the difference? "Education" was the answer I got.' He states it emphatically that if society is to be reformed, education has to reach everyone-high and low, because individuals are the very constituents of society. The sense of dignity rises in man when he becomes conscious of his inner spirit, and that is the very purpose of education. He strives to harmonize the traditional values of India with the new values brought through the progress of science and technology. It is in the transformation of man through moral and spiritual education that he finds the solution for all social evils. Founding education on the firm ground of our own philosophy and culture, he shows the best of remedies for today's social and global illness. Through his scheme of education, he tries to materialize the moral and spiritual welfare and upliftment of humanity, irrespective of caste, creed, nationality or time. However, Swami Vivekananda's scheme of education, through which he wanted to build up a strong nation that will lead the world towards peace and harmony, is still a far cry. It is high time that we give serious thought to his philosophy of education and remembers his call to everybody- 'Arise, awake, and stop not till the goal is reached.'

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