

Swami Vivekananda's Vision of Education: A Holistic Approach for the 21st Century

Dr.A. Arunkumar¹, C. Matumathi²

¹*Guest Lecturer Department of Philosophy University of Madras Chennai-05.*

²*IIIrd Year B. Com commerce, Sri Saradha College for Women Perambalur-621213*

Abstract—Swami Vivekananda's educational philosophy presents a transformative vision that integrates intellectual rigor, character formation, and spiritual consciousness. In an era dominated by technological advancement yet plagued by moral crises and mental health challenges, his ideas offer a timely framework for reimagining education. This paper examines Vivekananda's concept of "*man-making education*," its foundational principles, and its applicability in contemporary pedagogical systems. By analyzing his emphasis on self-realization, experiential learning, and service-oriented knowledge, this article argues for the adoption of a more holistic, value-based education system aligned with Vivekananda's vision.

Index Terms—Holistic education, Value-based learning, Vedantic pedagogy, Spiritual intelligenc

I. INTRODUCTION

The 21st century has witnessed unprecedented advancements in science, technology, and access to information. Yet, education systems worldwide face crises—rising student stress, ethical disorientation, and disconnect between schooling and real-world needs. Swami Vivekananda (1863–1902), India's foremost spiritual and intellectual revolutionary, foresaw these challenges and proposed an education model that harmonizes material progress with inner growth. His philosophy transcends religious boundaries, offering universal principles for nurturing complete human beings—physically robust, intellectually sharp, morally upright, and spiritually awakened.

II. SWAMI VIVEKANANDA'S IDEAS AND REFORMATION OF 21ST CENTURY EDUCATION IN INDIA

Swami Vivekananda had understood that mankind was passing through a crisis. The tremendous emphasis on the scientific and mechanical ways of life is fast reducing man to the status of a machine. Moral and religious values are being undermined. The fundamental principles of civilization are being ignored. According to Swamiji man is a compound of animality, humanity and divinity. The aim of education should be to help him grow from the animal to the divine state, through self-effort, self-realization and proper training. If modern India has failed in any domain, it is undoubtedly in the arena of producing human beings of genuine character. Today human beings, the key component of society, are hardly human in nature. Therefore, Swami Vivekananda envisaged the creation of man who is compassionate as well as intelligent, "great in heart and great in mind", and who, by dynamism, can bring about positive change in society. Swamiji said that, "We want the man whose heart feels intensely the miseries and sorrows of the world...And (we want) the man who not only can feel but can find the meaning of things, who delves deeply into the heart of nature and understanding. (We want) the man who will not even stop there (but) who wants to work out (the feeling and meaning by actual deeds). Such a combination of hand, heart, and head what we want." To him, education is not just cultivation of mental faculties as Plato thought. The development of the intellect must go along with the development of the heart, of hands and of the spirit. The heart must bleed for the poor and the downtrodden; hands must work dexterously, and the spirit must provide motivation for social work. According to Aristotle the greatest

virtue is intellectual and its Summum Bonum (The highest good) is contemplation. But contemplation, without action and ethical values, is not of much use and cannot uplift man or society.

The same ideas are reflected when Swamiji says, “The education which does not help the common mass of people to equip themselves for the struggle for 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? Real education is that which enables one to stand on one’s own legs.”

According to Vivekananda, “Education is not the amount of information that we put into your brain and runs riot there, undigested, all your life. We must have life building, man making, and character making assimilation of ideas. 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....the ass carrying its load of sandalwood knows only the weight and not the value of the sandalwood. If education is identical with information, the libraries are the greatest sages in the world, and encyclopedias are the rishis.” Therefore, it is evident that we want that education by which character is formed, strength of mind is increased, and the intellect is expanded and by which one can stand on one’s own feet. In addition to this, what we need today is 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 help and service, may earn enough to provide for them and save against a rainy day. Vivekananda says, “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 enter 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 man-making theories that we want. It is man-making education all round that we want.”

III. AIMS OF EDUCATION

According to Swami Vivekananda the Aim of Reaching Perfection The main aim of education is to achieve extensive perfection already in man. Swamiji opined that all material and spiritual knowledge is already present in man covered by curtain of ignorance. Education should tear off the veil so that the knowledge shines forth as an illuminating torch to enliven all the corners by and by.

Fulfillment of Swadharma Swami Vivekananda accepted the idea of Swadharma in education. Everyone has to grow like himself/herself. No one has to copy others. It is hence that he condemned the imposition of foreign education. He asked, “Getting by heart the thoughts of others in a foreign language and stuffing your brain with them and taking some university degree, you can pride yourself as educated. Is this education?” True improvement is self-inspired. There should not be any type of external pressure on the children. External pressure only creates destructive reactions leading to obstinacy and indiscipline. In an atmosphere of freedom, love, and sympathy alone, the child will develop courage and self-reliance. Educator should not constantly tell to the child do this and that. Such negative directions will confront the actual development of his intelligence and mentality. He should be encouraged to stand on his own, to be himself/herself. Hence Vivekananda suggested, “If you do not allow one to become a lion, he will become a fox.” So, it is obvious that education should be modified to meet the individual needs of each child. Everyone should be given equal opportunities to develop according to his or her own inner nature.

IV. MEANS OF EDUCATION

1. Love: The best means of education according to Swami Vivekananda is love. Education should be based on the love. Love is the best inspiration of character building. Children should be taught with love and care. This love is the love for men, for human beings. The only motive for imparting education should be love for the learner and for the man in him.
2. Help: The task of the educator is to help the learner in expressing his abilities and capacities. Educator should also help the learner to

recognize his cultural heritage and use it in his struggle of life. Educator only will help the learners to grow from insight.

3. Guidance: Education is not a bed of roses. Every learner has to face problems in his own life. He solves them by his own efforts and with the guidance of the teachers. The teacher should only instruct the learner to pay concentration/attention to his problems. The greater the attention, the more is the effort effective.
4. Brahmacharya: According to ancient Indian thinkers the Brahmacharya is the first means of achieving concentration. It gives spiritual and mental power of the highest kind. It transforms the sex drive into a spiritual force. Brahmacharya implies the purity of thoughts, words and deeds. It helps to develop and sharpen various psychological processes, e.g., learning, attention, remembering, thinking etc.
5. Discussion and Contemplation: Except concentration, the other means of education are discussion and contemplation. It is only through these that the learner may remove his difficulties. Discussion should be carried out in an informal atmosphere and contemplation should be practised in a calm and quiet atmosphere with the mind full alive. In the end of education, the learner should inculcate the faith and reverence for his/ her teachers. Without faith and reverence no true knowledge will be achieved.

V. TYPES OF EDUCATION

1. Physical Education

Physical weakness is the cause of at least one third of our miseries. The youth of India have become lazy. They cannot combine our thoughts and actions. Swamiji noticed that, "We speak of many things parrot-like, but never do them; speaking and not doing has become a habit with us. What is the cause of that? Physical weakness. This sort of weak brain is not able to do anything; we must strengthen it. First of all, our young men must be strong. Religion will come afterwards. Be strong, my young friends; that is my advice to you. You will be nearer to Heaven through football than through the study of the Gita...You will understand the Gita better with your biceps, your muscles, a little stronger. You will

understand the mighty genius and the mighty strength of Krishna better with a little of strong blood in you. You will understand the Upanishads better and the glory of the Atman when your body stands firm upon your feet, and you feel yourselves as men.

2. Religious and Moral Education

According to Swamiji religion must be an integral part of the twenty first century education system. Undoubtedly, it can be stated that misunderstanding or misconception of the term "Religion", in India, is one of the major social harms. Religion, which is, according to Swamiji, "manifestation of divinity already in man", has been misunderstood and misinterpreted to serve to selfish ends of a few educated and upper-class people. Religion, which is realization, has been reduced to certain ceremonies and rituals. The most people have been made to believe that religion is performance of certain ceremonies on certain auspicious days and there is nothing beyond that. The masses have been kept in darkness about the real basis of religion and the spiritual texts and the truth they contain. So much so a lot of superstitious ideas have spread among the masses as religion and religious observation. They have been deprived from the nectar of the great Vedic and Upanishadic truths and these truths, which are meant to uplift the life of people and give them peace and happiness, have failed to do so.

This has resulted in all evils that we see in the society of today. When Swami Vivekananda described religion as "the innermost core of education", he referred to its quintessential elements –universal love, purity, freedom, manliness, and selflessness. He wanted religion to serve the noble cause of making everyone pious. Religion, he says, is "the idea which is raising the brute unto man, and man unto god." By religion he did not mean any particular sects or dogma but the eternal principles of truth and virtue which lie at the root of all faiths, and which are essentials for the spiritual regeneration of humankind. His concept of religion was based on faith-faith in oneself before having faith in god. Religious education could be greatly useful for inculcating moral values among students, and for making them realize that all life is one. Religion can teach them the art and science of living, and bring them into contact prophets, mystic, and saints who led a selfless life. Evolve souls epitomize lofty ideals which can

transform the society- Jesus Christ represents the ideal of love and forgiveness; Buddha and Mahabira of peace and nonviolence; Sri Rama of virtue and moral law (Maryada) in life; Pavana Putra Hanuman of continence, obedience, service and strength; Sita of chastity and feminine grace; Sri Krishna of a great Yogi and so on. If students can hold on to an ideal of their choice, their personality would change for better. Religious education could further empower the inner personality of the students by developing their heart, not of course in medical sense, but by instilling into them the feelings of love and compassion for others.

As the western model of education focuses on the intellect, ignoring the heart completely, it leaves personality insular, and makes students “ten times” more selfish. “An intellectual, heartless man never becomes an inspired man.” Vivekananda said. “Just as intellect is the instrument of knowledge, so is the heart, the instrument of inspiration... Properly cultivated, the heart Will go beyond intellect; it will be changed into inspiration.” The social overtone in Swami Vivekananda’s concept of religious education distinguishes him from the others 19th century thinker. He once wrote, “I do not believe in god or a religion which cannot wipe the widow’s tears or bring a piece of bread to the orphan’s mouth.” Through education he wanted to sensitize the youth about the problems facing mankind and to prepare them for leadership roles for bringing about social change. To him “religion means expansion, and expansion means realization and perception in the highest sense – mumbling words or genuflections. Man is to become divine, realizing the divine more and more from day to day in an endless progress.”

3. Science Education

Swami Vivekananda had experienced the ancient truths through inward journey under the guidance of Sri Ramakrishna. Swamiji had really understood that “Religion without science is blind; science without religion is lame” (Einstein). Along with it he had the pulse of western scientific approach. He felt the need for bridging the gaps between western science and eastern philosophy. For this, he took a holistic approach of the western science & eastern religion. He said, “We need to study, independent of foreign control, different branches of 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 themselves and save against a rainy day.” While Vivekananda has talked about the need of western thoughts, science and technology, he cautioned his countrymen, “what we want are western sciences coupled with Vedanta, Brahmacharya as the guiding motto and also Shraddha in one’s self.

4. Women Education

There is a statement which says- “If a man is educated, an individual is educated, and if a woman is educated, a family is educated.” Manu says, “Where women are respected, there Gods delight and where they are not, there all work and effort come to naught.” Yet in India so much difference is made between man and woman. The men have turned the women into mere manufacturing machines and they deprived from getting their basic rights, binding them by hard and rigid rules. “All nations”, Swamiji said, “have attained greatness by paying proper respect to woman.

That country and that nation which do not respect women have never become great, nor will it be in future.” Swami Vivekananda regarded woman as the embodiment of Shakti, the primordial energy of the universe. He said that male and female can contribute equally for the development of the nation. Therefore, education for woman is as much important for a nation’s development as that of men, with the difference that they required to be trained differently in view of the difference in their physical and mental make-up and their social roles. He believed that woman could excel in all fields of human activity if treated on par with men and given proper education and training.

According to him women are equally competent to take up intellectual pursuits. In this respect, he questioned the conservatives thus: “In what scripture do you find statement that women are not competent for knowledge and devotion?” He felt that “Unless Indian women are given proper education and respectable place in this country, the nation can never march forward.” He advised that, “Ideal characters must always be presented before the view of the girls to imbue them with a devotion to lofty principles of selflessness.”

VI. CONCLUSION

To conclude it can be stated that Swami Vivekananda has foreseen that mankind is passing through a crisis. Conflicts of ideals, manners and habits are pervading the atmosphere. Disrespect for everything old is the fashion of the day. From the analysis of Vivekananda's scheme of education, it is clear that the uplift of masses is possible only through education. For the upliftment of humanity, irrespective of poverty, religions, caste, and creed education must be given first. Standing on the vantage ground of experience he asked, "What makes difference between Europe and India?" "Education! Education! Education alone" is the answer he himself has given and firmly advised his disciples: "Let the reading of the Vedanta and practicing of meditation and chanting of Gita be left for the next life. Let this body go in the services of others, then I shall know that your coming to me has not been in vain." He says "Feel, my children feel; feel for the poor, the ignorant, the downtrodden!" It is only through the scheme of education of Swamiji we can instill in our forth coming generation the passion for excel and compassion to service and share, the indomitable will to serve the poor, ignorant and downtrodden based on whose we have become intellect, rich & independent.

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