

# SWAMI VIVEKANANDA: A BRIEF REVIEW OF EDUCATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

<sup>1</sup>Oorja Tiwari, <sup>2</sup>Dr. Anju Walia

<sup>1</sup>Research Scholar Shri JJT University, Rajasthan <sup>2</sup>Research Supervisor, JJT University

**Abstract:** Swami Vivekananda has been hailed as the greatest teacher of humanity. His concept, method, scope of education is known to be very comprehensive as it is not confined to the limits of time and space. Being universal, his methods and approaches are being adopted though may be in a modified manner throughout the universe. He is a monk who furnished ample inrush of information on education that is quite enough to change it for the better. He renders education as the life changing process and in a sense it transforms itself into preparation of life. He is a great monk of humanity who worked painstakingly for the amelioration of the society. He has deep and profound insights to be given to the modern educators for modifying the very process of education. One of the contributions that Swami Vivekananda has rendered in education is the very linking of religion with education as he was of the view that religion is the fundamental element in the very education process as without religion, no one can actually improve his character. Hence in order to make an individual a better human being, religion has been termed as a foundation for basing education. Many of the educators have discussed the issue of education and seen it as a divorced from religious linkage. This paper however focuses on Swami Vivekananda's very concept of education, providing a brief review of his educational perspective and trying to evaluate his education as a correlated form of religion, education in co-existence with religious inputs can sustain the needs of the time.

**Keywords:** Correlation of religion & Education, religion, spirituality, education

## INTRODUCTION:

Let us first know briefly the personality of Swami Vivekananda though it would be, of course a mockery as there is no one who would not have heard his name in India or abroad, and if perchance, there happens to be a man unaware of him, he had been so ignorant person. Swami Vivekananda is acknowledged as one of the earliest of Yogi in India who was a diehard preacher of Indian Vedanta Philosophy. Swami Vivekananda, a philosopher, sage and spiritual guru was born on 12th January, 1863 and left for heavenly abode on 4th July, 1902. He was born in Calcutta in a rich Bengali family to the lucky and blessed parents Vishwanath Dutta and Bhuvaneshwari Devi. His earlier name was Narendranath Dutta and the name "Vivekananda" was conferred to him in 1893 by Ajit Singh of Khetri which means one who becomes spiritually conscious and enlightened. He followed the Indian philosophy of Vedanta and yoga and spread it to the west. He took pains to revive Hinduism and tried to instill the spirit of nationalism among the Indians. He was a voracious reader and was well verse with Indian and western languages; and had deep knowledge of both eastern and western philosophies. Apart from it, he was well read in Indian classics. He was well acquainted with philosophers like David Hume, Immanuel Kant, Johann Gottlieb Fichte, Baruch Spinoza, Georg W.F. Hegel, Arthur Schopenhauer, Auguste Comte, John Stuart Mill and Charles Darwin. A turning point in his life occurred, when he got a chance to meet Ramakrishna who later became his spiritual guru. His meeting with Ramakrishna was quite strange as it so happened that in the Literature class when his teacher was teaching Wordsworth's poem 'Excursion', he pointed out that the true meaning of the word 'trance' can be learnt by visiting Ramakrishna, Vivekananda and some other students were obliged to visit him. He did not advocate the worship of idols and polytheism. He even did not agree with Ramakrishna's way of worshipping Kali, the goddess. He later laid stone of Ramakrishna Math after the demise of his guru. He started visiting different parts of the country and met people from the different strata of the society. He reached Chicago on 30 July, 1893. On 11th September, 1893 he delivered his famous speech on India and Hinduism. His fame spread and brought for him many followers of great repute like Josephine MacLeod, William James, Josiah Royce, Robert G. Ingersoll, Nikola Tesla, Lord Kelvin, Harriet Monroe and Emma Calve to name a few.

## Educational Contribution of Swami Vivekananda:

Swami Vivekananda believed in the philosophy that the learner has to seek knowledge himself. There is no substitute for it. Unless the learner himself is ready to find out truth and knowledge, he cannot be motivated for the same by any external force. The role of the teacher is to motivate, as he says, "no one can teach anybody". Success can only be gained if the learner has kindled inner self motivation. Self-motivated learners can highly achieve success as they are the true seekers of knowledge; ones whose inquiry of the mind for the knowledge is never ending. True education in this sense should enkindle this very self-motivation and must enable the learners with a spirit to search for knowledge and truth. The role of the teacher is to facilitate like the Gardner who has to water the plants in order them to grow but he cannot make them grow:

**"You cannot teach a child any more than you can grow a plant.... You can take away the obstacles but knowledge comes out of its own nature!"<sup>1</sup>**

Education can ignite the spark inside the mind of a student but it is up to the student to give it the form of a fire. Hence Vivekananda emphasises on kindling that very spark inside the student so that self-learning can be promoted. He does not talk of education as cramming of facts or passing out classes and grabbing degrees. What he implies by search of knowledge and truth is education of the highest degree. It is the knowledge of the self; it's the spiritual realisation of one's being and existence. He propounds the belief that knowledge and truth is inside man; its inherent in the self but man is ignorant being; unaware of the self's being. Hence it becomes imperative all the more that man must strive unabated to attain the knowledge of the self. This very spiritual realisation is worth hankering after as devoid of it man is lost in the wilderness of the world. That is why education to him is

***manifestation of perfection already in man.***

Man has to come to terms with this perfection which has been camouflaged inside man and if he could seek that and uncover it- education has notched up its purpose.

In the times of Swami Vivekananda, he noticed that the society was passing through very tumultuous phases of change. Scientific and technical education was sweeping its way everywhere. There was no wrong with it as this paved a way for the people to ward off the superstitions and other ways of life that downgraded them. But as they ignited their dark horizons of life, this education also ushered in its train an emphasis for only material things. Hence it gradually turned man into a machine without any ethical values. It was defective system of education. On the system of education adopted during his time, he has to say,

***“There is greater impetus towards higher education on the European lines... The foreign conqueror is not there to do any good to us; he wants money. So these educational institutions of foreigners are simply to get a lot of useful practical slaves for a little money- to turn out a lot of clerks, postmasters, telegraph operators and so on. Such an education did not make the Indians practical in scientific or technological sense, nor did it solve the problem of poverty.”<sup>2</sup>***

Western system of education prevalent during his time was enough to make slaves for the British empire with the sole aim of churning out clerks or at most some lawyers who can work in their courts or offices. There was no impetus on bringing out real advancement in scientific field. British did not want Indians to learn much science so that they should not develop themselves and their country and be slaves to their tunes always. Vivekananda was full of wrath onto this and criticized the Indian in very humiliating words:

***“Fie upon you. Is this education?... What good will it do you or the country at large?” He wanted Indians to master the real knowledge coming from the west. He wanted them to learn science and technology so that they can, “Set yourselves to dig the earth and produce foodstuffs.....discovering new avenues to production, by your own exertions aided by Western science.”<sup>3</sup>***

Swami ji wanted that human society should be moulded in a way that along with scientific education which is quite an imperative for the development of the society, there should coexist ethical considerations in the human beings otherwise the society would lose its moral base which is pre-requisite for it. Hence for building up such a society he advocated that religion is the fundamental value for human beings. Without religion the society can never progress. Vivekananda sees religion as innermost significant element of every strata of society. Religion in a sense is vital component without the absence of which there is a great danger to the very spirit of brotherhood: He praised religion as:

***Religion being the most fundamental element in uniting all the social entities like a cohesive. All the forces that have laboriously contributed to the development of human race and moulded its very destiny, religion is credited with supreme importance for the same.***

Religion is not in strict terms define ostentatious conduct; rituals, traditions and ceremonies. A person who constantly visits temple or any other religious place is not religious. In Vivekananda's scheme of education religion is the most significant element. He does not see education devoid of religion. Rather he advocates that religion should be inseparable part of all educational system in the absence of which education is insignificant. He says quite emphatically:

***“I look upon religion as the innermost core of education. Mind, I do not mean my own or anybody else's opinion about religion. The true eternal principles have to be held before people.”<sup>4</sup>***

Vivekananda dwells on the spiritual realization of knowledge which is all inside man but it has to be rediscovered and re-identified as it lies latent in man. The very aim of education and religion according to Vivekananda is to make man capable of realizing this very end. Spiritual enlightenment however does not imply that one should become a monk but in his terminology, it does imply the power of knowing one's own self. Self-realisation and recognition are the part and parcel for every individual for progress and growth. Without self- realisation, the individual always lurks in the dark. Person's inner development and growth remains a distant dream . Thus as education aims at the overall growth and holistic development of a person's character what is important is the inner most gradual development of a person's character and it becomes feasible only through the virtue of education's capability for spiritual ends.

He says in this very connection:

***“Education is the manifestation of the perfection already in man. No knowledge comes from outside; it is all inside.”<sup>5</sup>***

As a spiritual Guru he preached only self-realisation as the principal aim of education and religion. If education fails in this endeavour then education is not befitting to be gained. True education as well as religion is the one which can actualise this very aim and purpose. True Education must enable every person to identify his real persona. Once this very persona is achieved, the process of knowledge initiates and will continue to flourish throughout one's life.

**CORRELATION OF RELIGION AND EDUCATION:**

Vivekananda conflates both religion and education as he thinks that education is not worthy without religion. Religion is the principal crux of Vivekananda's educational philosophy. He expects the learner to adopt in his personality all the spiritual or secular knowledge. It is the knowledge that helps man to become a good and responsible human being. He is of the opinion that mere accumulation of degrees is not education. Education is not tantamount to filling of facts into the mind rather, it is the supreme power that makes man realise the true worth of his existence. He opines:

***Education is not the amount of information that is put into your brain and runs riot there, undigested all your life....If education is identical with information, the libraries are the greatest sages in the world and the encyclopaedias are the Rishis.”<sup>6</sup>***

Vivekananda affirms the view that the ultimate aim of education and religion is to regenerate and rebuild man. Man has degraded himself from being civilized being into a savage. Metamorphosis can be observed in his stature of what he was and what he has been now.

Such deterioration from being divine to being temporal is the outcome of education which is replete with pitfalls; education which has failed us all through these centuries. Education must bless man and mould his personality.

*“The end of all education, all training, should be man-making. The end and aim of all training is to make man grow.”<sup>7</sup>*

He was in favour of religious education. He believed that Gita, Upanishads and Vedas are very essential components of religious education and their study should be made compulsory part of curriculum. Without the initiation of religious education, good moral behaviour cannot be introduced and cultivated in the human beings. He therefore emphasised the inculcation of morality through the vehicle of religious education as religion which obviously he did not classify into the categorization of Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, Christian or any other rather by religion he meant the underlying spirit of every religion, teaches us how to be a good and upright human being with a clear conscience within. Thus he believed that only through the touch of religious education, moral and ethical conduct in the human beings can be awakened.

Education as per Swami Vivekananda is not the bare cramming of facts; a mere cheap information. The principal problem that the world is wading through is that the world has new inrush of information so much that it fails to understand what to do with it. The consequent result is chaos. Information is mounting up and the wisdom is being shorn off. It is the very thing that creates concern for him and he strives hard to pick up the threads of the society so that it could be again rearranged. But the very threads are so hard to be placed together and could be done so through insightful education only. But what is education? Let us grasp it. Education as per his ideology is: “It is man-making religion that we want. It is man-making theories that we want. It is man-making education all round that we want.” He advocated strongly that education can tear away the very layer of superstitions, fears and other redundant elements that cripple man’s spiritual journey; hampering in the very path:

*Dogmas, mysteries and rituals are not conducive to a spiritual life. Religious education in the true sense is to encourage the child to understand his own relationship to people, to things and to nature. There is no existence without relationship; and without self-knowledge, all relationship, with the one and with the many, brings conflict and sorrow. Of course, to explain this fully to a child is impossible; but if the educator and the parents deeply grasp the full significance of relationship, then by their attitude, conduct and speech they will surely be able to convey to the child, without too many words and explanations, the meaning of spiritual life.<sup>8</sup>*

If man is rebuilt and is spiritually awakened, the spirit of right understanding will also be cultivated. Right Understanding means prioritizing relationships over physical facilities. When a man is capable of spiritual regeneration he can very well understand his role in society as he is endowed with wisdom gained through right education. Right understanding ensures right relationships with family, society and flora and fauna. Education must facilitate with process by making changes into the individual’s psychological working. But this cannot be rendered fruitful if there is fear and insecurity. Fear hampers the process of good relationships by making man self-centred. One must eradicate fear if we want to make our society a heaven.

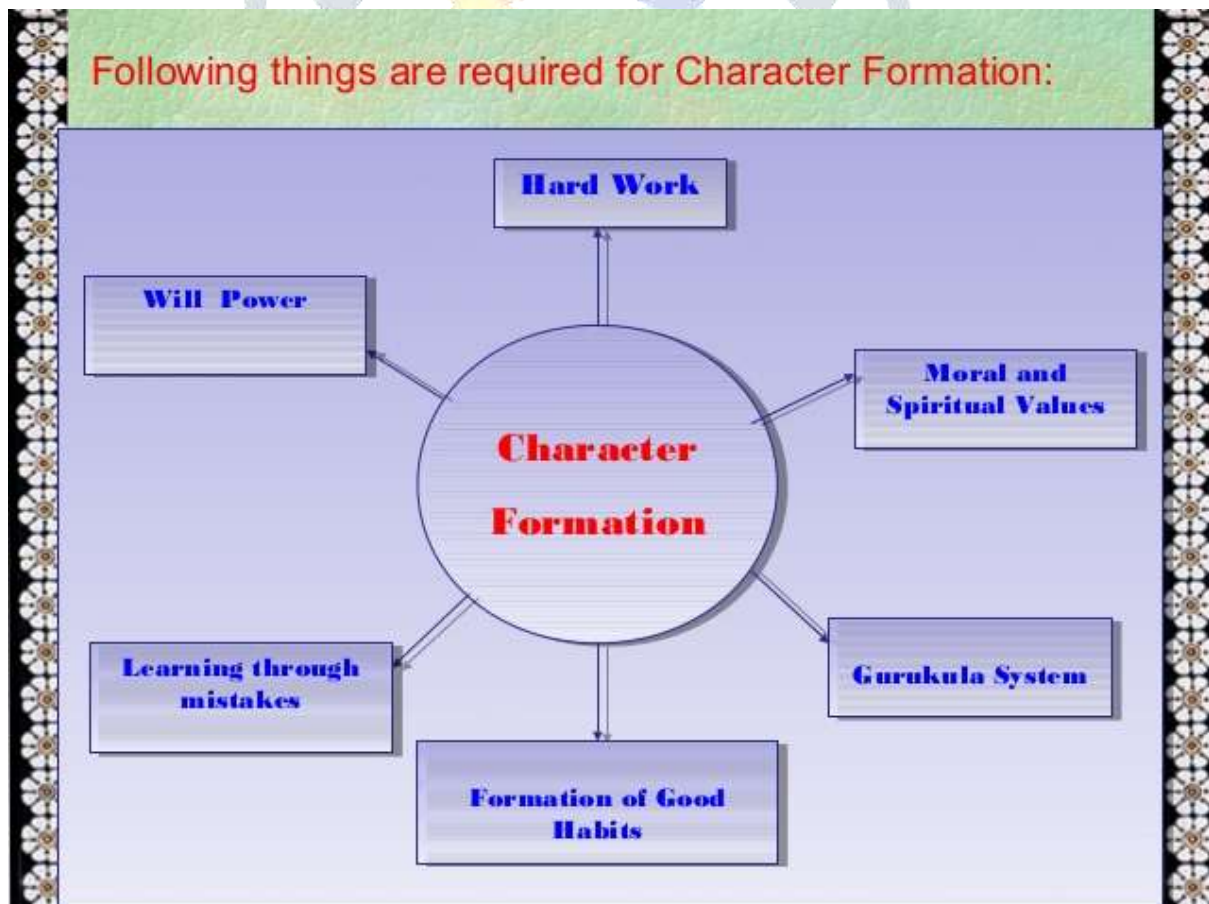


Figure 1: Swami Vivekananda's Ideal of education

Well the Figure. 1, discusses the very conception of Swami Vivekananda that he set for education to realize. Vivekananda believed that education must realize the aim of man making education. By which he implied that education must have an end in itself. It must be dedicated to the growth of an individual personality. It must develop the individual from all ends. Character formation being the most important end that education must seek.

### **AIMS OF EDUCATION:**

**Spiritual Development aim:** Education must cater to this very aim. A man must be spiritually awakened and thus must be able to know 'Who is he?' This is the very predicament of modern society which does not believe in spiritual regeneration. Hence, there is multiplicity of problems at our end.

**Physical development:** A sound and healthy mind can only sustain in a healthy body. Thus for Swami Vivekananda, the physical development is a goal that education must set for itself. Without attaining good health, the progress of individual cannot be ensured and without ensuring the progress of the individual, the progress and growth of the country can never be ensured. Thus it is of vital importance that education makes man fit physically to render the best in favour of best.

**Intellectual development:** Education must make man capable of thinking rational and intellectual ideas. This is one of the important aims that education must notch up. Intellectual development is only feasible with greater intellect when that intellect is kindled through the very spark of education.

**Harmonious Development:** In a sense Swami Vivekananda was in favour of harmonious development of the individual. Developing an individual from all ends: Social, economic, personal and intellectual is the aim that most of the educators have also sought of, from the very process of education. Swami ji also wanted that education must realise the same goal of harmonious development for the individual.

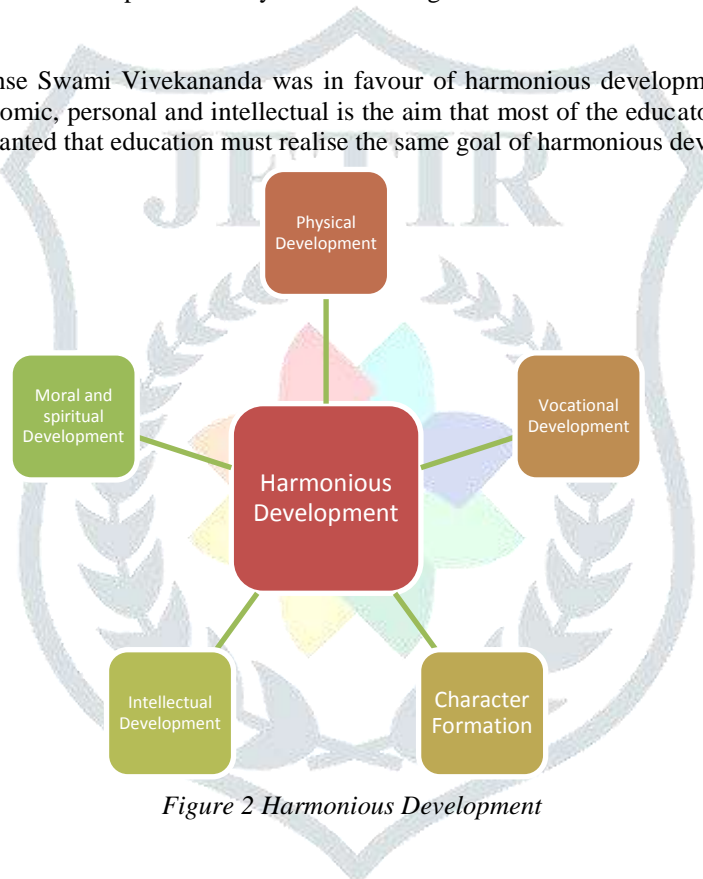


Figure 2 Harmonious Development

### **Conclusion:**

In a nutshell, one can see that education according to Swami Vivekananda is a very comprehensive term which can imply briefly as the power that kindles the very latent and dormant inner most faculties of an individual soul. Thus the very aim of education can never be to enable an individual to pass out an examination and accumulate plethora of degrees. That is a very limited vision of education. In fact education is not confined to that end, it is very high in its ideals. Moreover Swami ji conflates education with religious ends as he believes that education and religion can go a long way together as religion is one of the fundamental and core values that the society must seek in its very essence. Discussing the aims of education, he very evidently talks about the harmonious development as the core of education. Without the harmonious blend of all the capabilities of an individual, it is very tough for an individual to be able to assert confidently that he is educated.

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