

Women Education in Swami Vivekananda's Philosophy of Education

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"Educate your women first and leave them to themselves, then they will tell you what reforms are necessary for them"

-Vivekananda

ABSTRACT: woman like man had the three elements of reason, courage and appetite though in different degrees. Women shared with men a common education, a common responsibility for rearing up children and common guardianship of the state in peace and war. In the field of administration and public service there is no difference between women and men. Women are capable of holding both civil and military offices. Women must receive the same education as men. In this paper, I am trying to highlight the view and concept of women education in the Swami Vivekananda's Philosophy of education. Swamiji found education as the best and only device to solve all problems of women and hereby emancipate them.

KEY WORDS: Upanisads, Gita, Vedanta, Buddhistic Brahmacharinis, Svayambara, Manu, universal, education, spiritualistic.

INTRODUCTION: The spiritual culture which India developed in her ancient Upanisads and the Gita got re-oriented by Buddha, Sankara, Sri Ramakrishna, Swami Vivekananda and many other luminous sages of India, possessed of brilliant intellect and universal heart. In Vedic India equal opportunities were offered to men and women, boys and girls for education and spiritual enlightenment. Due to such equality we find many instances of women as revealers of Vedic wisdom such as Viswavara, Gargi, Saswati, Maitreyi Apala, Ghosa and Aditi. Even in the social sphere women enjoyed enormous freedom. The ancient custom of 'Svayambara' indicates how women were free to choose their life partners according to their inclination.

Never the less, the Hindu Law giver, Manu also said, "Just as the equal halves of a fruit posses the same properties in equal nature, the same attributes and the same properties in equal proportion , so man and woman being the equal halves of the same substance posses equal rights, equal privileges and equal powers".

In the Buddhistic period of Indian history we find equal respect to women, granting opportunities for their all round development. But later on, when Buddhism declined, the dark days in the educational sphere of Indian women crept up. The Orthodox Brahmin regained their power to establish the social organization in accordance with the hereditary system of class divisions. They excluded both women and masses from their monopoly of spiritualism. Indeed it was post –Buddhistic period, the position of women in India was largely degenerated. During Muslim rule women of India were not only deprived of their equal rights and status with men but were insecure in life.

Under the influence of British rule, the status of Indian women was terribly shaken leaning towards exotic civilization. After all, being deprived of their own national education men and women of India lost their own spiritual tradition and culture.

At last in the first quarter of the nineteenth century modern India awakened with vehement hopes and aspirations. Swami Vivekananda, the patriotic saint of modern India brought about a Copernican revolution in the thought and culture in India. No doubt Ram Mohan and Iswar Chandra Vidhyasagar intended to change women's social status from outside. But Vivekananda delved deep into the root to eradicate the obstacles that stood against their free growth and development. Being an idealist Swami Vivekananda insisted on absolute values which were to be realized by a system of education that upheld all the hidden potentialities in them. His penetrative vision picked up the fundamental point that sudden fall of Indian women high pedestal of Vedic culture was due to want of education.

MEANING OF EDUCATION: Education rooted in age old tradition and culture is the basic requirement for the academic reawakening of a nation. Nevertheless, Vivekananda's vision delved deep into Indian national life to feel the pulse of it and at the end of his spiritual quest he found out the key, lying in proper education of both men and women alike. A bird with one wing can't fly. So long as women in India were not provided education for all growth-physical, mental, moral and spiritual, much of the problems of national life would remained unsolved.

To Vivekananda, principal reason why our race was so degenerated is that we had no respect for the living image of Sakti. The real education according to Vivekananda can be sum up in the pithy statement: That is education which leads to liberation. The first task of education is to make of the people of the country strong. To Vivekananda, the education which does not help the people to equip themselves for the struggle for life or which does not bring strength of character, can't be treated as worth its name. The dominant theme of Indian history is the underlying unity in diversity. Education must be on national lines through national methods. It should covered all aspects of life- physical, intellectual, emotional, moral and spiritual and all stages of life from birth to death. Education should play a vital role in removing weakness which is the source of all selfishness.

IDEAL OF EDUCATION: Swami Vivekananda's main ideal of education was man-making, character building assimilation of ideas. He was anxious to put into operation a scheme of education for women which would make them fearless, conscious of dignity and chastity. To him, most sound scheme of education for women is one which teaches them to develop a strong character by the force of which they will be prepared to lay down their lives, rather than flinch an inch from their chastity. It is this spiritual ideal that Indian women have been following from the time immemorial. Purity, simplicity, faithfulness and chastity have all along been valued by them more than any material object. Never the less, self-abnegation and service have marked their character which again is the sine qua non of Indian culture.

In the Upanisadic period we came across one outstanding who set the pattern of the ideals of India's womanhood. The norm and modality of conduct and behaviour as set forth by that great woman seers of Vedic times determined the path and the goal for Indian womanhood for all time to come. Swami Vivekananda wanted to direct women to their own cultural ideal. Religious training and formation of character should be their primary concern. In the west Vivekananda visualized that though women enjoyed ample freedom in all walks of life, yet material prosperity was the coveted goal of their life and culture. The women of the west must learn from India that the aim of human life should be the spiritual destiny. Every Indian woman literate or illiterate leads her life on a fair level of spiritual ideal.

OBJECTIVE OF EDUCATION: Swami Vivekananda's objective of education is clear. If education is directed towards the formation of ideal character based on the foundation of purity and chastity, there will reborn ideal women like Sita, Savitri, Gargi and Maitreyi. Women's education primarily aims at equipping them properly with all that modern knowledge may bestow. Women have more right to education than men have, because they are going to

be the mothers of future generation. According to Vivekananda, in the west, “women are more learned than men. They are well versed in science and philosophy and that is why they would appreciate and honour me so much. It is education of both head and heart that make them respect others. Although their educational aim was materialistic, yet their catholicity of mind impressed him most.

The most fundamental point which Vivekananda considered most was that Indian woman must preserve their womanly nature. They need not invade men’s sphere of activity and become masculine in their bearing. For that will be alienation from Indian ideal. Alien culture let freely into our society may cause havoc. We must be aware of that women in India have to maintain their female charm and modesty and dignity in order to keep balance and harmony in our social system.

It is important for mothers to be well trained. Otherwise, children will not inherit those qualities which are great and inspiring. If we want to have children, strong and intelligent, we must educate their mothers first. As in the Vedic period, so also in the present age, education of women should be given freely, irrespective of caste discriminations. Proper education should include moral training. The whole of ethics depends upon love, which means not selfish love, but the expression of oneness in spirit. Each soul is potentially divine, and any system of education which is based upon this fundamental principal of potential divinity in the soul of the individual, would be considered as the highest. Women should have equal right and privileges with men. That should be the ideal, and then the highest perfection which is latent in the soul will be realized. Education should not degrade a woman. It should not be for money- making. It should be the culture of the soul for the good of all.

At the same time Vivekananda pointed out those grown-up girls should be properly educated so that the evil consequences of adult marriages as apprehended by orthodox section might never follow. As he asserted, “If you do not give opportunities to one to become a lion, no wonder that he will become a cunning fox. Women are Sakti or power but that Sakti is being used for bad purpose alone. The reason is that men are oppressing them. So they are like vixen only. But when there will not be any more oppression, they will surely become lionesses”.

CURRICULUM FOR WOMEN EDUCATION: Vivekananda wanted great contribution of Indian women to the culture and civilization of India. There are many superstitions, the accretions of ages, in our religious observances, in our personal conduct and social life. By means of education women can discard them and adhere to eternal truths of spiritual life. Society of every country shapes its destiny. The education of women should include subjects like Religion, Arts, Science, History, Home-management, Cooking, Sewing and Hygiene. For this trained Brahmacharinis should go to villages and towns, open centers and do hard work for women’s welfare and progress. To Vivekananda, the character building has to be made the corner stone of education in women. The noble example of Sita, Savitri, Damayanti, Lilabati, Khana, Gargi, Maitreyi and others should be brought home to them so that they would be inspired to mould their lives in their light.

Initiated by Swami Vivekananda, Sister Nivedita established a girl’s school adjacent to women’s Math in Calcutta in the year 1895. The curriculum was followed in the school according to Swamiji’s scheme. As such the subjects included were –religious scriptures, literature, Sanskrit, grammar, rudiments of English. Even sewing, nursing, upbringing of children were also included in it. Furthermore those who were fit for Yoga were allowed to stay in the Math for whole life. Otherwise they were permitted to enter into household life.

CONCLUSION: Swami Vivekananda had great respect for ideal womanhood like Sita and Sabitri. To him Sita was a symbol of soft, sweet and pure personality as well as an embodiment of patience and sufferings. The ideal womanhood wants such of women as pure and soft as Sita. To quote Vivekananda’s words, “Sita has gone to the very vitals of our race. She is there in the blood of every Hindu man and woman; we are all children of Sita. Any attempt to modernize our women, if it tries to take our woman away from the ideals of Sita, is immediately failure, as we see every day. The woman of India must grow and develop in the footprints of Sita and that is the only way”. Referring to the western ideal Vivekananda said, “In the west, the woman is wife. The ideal of womanhood is

concentrated there as the wife. To the ordinary man in India, the whole force of womanhood is concentrated in motherhood. In the western home, the wife rules, in the Indian home, the mother rules”.

A successful nation requires that the citizens must participate in its social, cultural, economic and political activities. Education has been related to the theoretical knowledge and information with its practical needs. Education helps men to contribute their parts to art, sciences, literature, architecture and other fields for the enrichment of culture and civilization. But unfortunately in the modern world morality has lost its value denying human worth and dignity. Vivekananda visualized this cultural crisis in modern world and felt the need for changing its direction from human sensuality to human spirituality. This is real wisdom as Vedanta preached from time immemorial.

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