



# Indian women in the light of Swami Vivekananda

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**Abstract:** Swami Vivekananda was a renowned thinker, great social reformer and an icon to all the people of the world. It is known to all that he was one of the greatest social reformers among others in nineteenth century in India. Some persons have mentioned him as a founder of modern India. He was voiceful against various social injustice. At his time, the place of women in the society was too neglected. They were treated as ‘manufacturing machine’. Swamiji was the first person who told about self-dependency of women by giving education by which they could solve their own Problems. He teaches us to see all the women as mother (the living image of power). He speaks regarding women empowerment, women education and their real freedom. This paper is attempted to show the real picture of women from the time of Swamiji to present time.

**Keywords:** Mother, Equality, Women Education, Social Reform, Women Empowerment, Freedom

## Introduction:

*“Ei viśve jā kichu mahan sṛṣṭi chirakalyānkar,  
Ardhek jā rachiyāche nāri ardhek tār nārī”.*

-Kaji Najrul Islam

*“Kono jātir pragatir Śreṣṭha māpkāṭi nārider prati Tāhār manobhāb”*

-Swami Vivekananda

We can understand the role of women in the world from the quotes of Kazi Nazrul Islam and Swami Vivekananda mentioned above. It is known to all that the woman is related with creation and destruction. We call many things of this universe as female like world as our mother (*dharitrimā*), rivers, trees, hills, waterfalls etc. Even, we know them as male or female by name like Jamuna, Ganges, Saraswati etc. are various rivers as female on the other side, Ajay, Damodar etc. are known as male rivers. In the course of trees, we know them as male or female by name viz. Kamini, Tagar, Jaba, Golap etc. are trees of flowers, on the other side, we know various trees

as male like Bata, Tamal, Sal, Ashvattha etc. So, from the above statements it is very clear to us that everywhere we must find the role of women in this world. Hence, from the Vedic era to present modern era we are seeing the importance of women in every cases. We find it in the Sankhya philosophy also that where Prakriti is the main creator beside Purusha. Here, it may be stated that men and women are two sides of a coin. One is not complete without other. It is very true that without upliftment of women no nation can develop. We find various statements, views from many sages, great men, social reformers for the upliftment of women. Here, this paper is attempted to show how Vivekananda had seen women in his intuition.

## I

According to Swami Vivekananda, ideal, development of any caste and good or bad - all are relative. Because, when anything is good for one, other will say it is bad. Any custom may be valid for one country or society, again, that may not be acceptable for other countries such as marriage between cousins are legal in America but not in India. He says, in India ideal women is mother.

The term 'woman' refers to mother in India whereas woman is treated as wife in western countries. In India, the term 'mother' is an ideal term. Even, not only that in India, we call the Goddess as "mother". We respect every woman as mother. Swamiji, says, "If anybody ask that what is the Position of Indian woman?"<sup>1</sup> He also told that there is a difference between a woman and a mother. When you see a woman as wife, there must be a demanding relation such as if you don't fulfil her wish, she may give you divorce. But a mother never demands anything from you. She always prays to God for her son and daughters. 'Mother' is that term while it would be pronounced; devotion and respect will be revealed in his or her mind automatically. There will be no lust or libido. Hence, it may be stated here that a woman is not only become a wife but also become a mother, sister, daughter, niece etc. He used to say that as I belong to a monk community, I am to see each and every woman or girl as mother. This is our Indian culture which is not found in any place of western countries. He also told that in our civilization and culture marriage is an institution where a woman is bound to go to the house of her father-in-law. There are some restrictions in the marriage of Hindu culture such as no one can marry his or her own relatives, a woman goes with his husband's house. She thinks that after the marriage the house of her father-in-law is her own house, because she will live her whole life and works or nurse under her mother-in-law. In this manner, "Swamiji says that in our culture, the place of mother was highest then wife and then daughter"<sup>2</sup>. That is

to say, he means to say here that mother is the chief and only ideal in India whereas wife is the chief in the western culture. Now, let us see about women education in the perspective of Vivekananda.

## II

Swamiji defines education as – “Education is the manifestation of perfection already in man”. He also states that education is not learn some words; it is the manifestation of our inner powers of modifications; may be stated that education is that process by which a person’s will must go to the good will successfully.<sup>3</sup>In that sense, he wants to say that everyone can acquire education. So, women have also right to acquire education. He had realized that without acquiring education of women a nation can’t develop. Hence, he opines that women should participate in higher education also. He had given an example that where Oxford, Cambridge University of England and Harvard and Yale University of America do not open the door for women to acquire education but University of Calcutta has opened the door for women.<sup>4</sup>So, he would support women for acquiring education. In this context we can mention another great social reformer Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar who was a strong advocate for women's education in 19th century. The Bethune school, named after Scottish reformer John Elliot Drinkwater Bethune, was founded by Vidyasagar in 1849 in Kolkata. The school's primary aim was to provide education to girls, which was a revolutionary idea during that time. Swamiji emphasized that educating women would lead to the development of strong and virtuous families, as women are the primary influencers in the upbringing of children, because we know that mother is the first teacher of every child at home. He believed that educated women would be able to install moral values, ethical principles and a sense of spirituality in the younger generation. He also recognized that women possessed innate spiritual strength and had the ability to attain spiritual enlightenment. Let us see in the next chapter the view of equality according to Swami Vivekananda.

## III

Swami Vivekananda believed in the fundamental equality of men and women. He emphasized that gender should not be a barrier to personal development, spiritual enlightenment and social reforms. No nation can be developed without equality in education of both men and women. In this context, we may state an analogy here that i.e., as no bird can fly in the sky with the help of single wing; no nation can develop with the help of single gender (men). It needs both wings (men and women). He has given an example from the *Vrihadaranyaka*

*Upanishad* where he wants to show that there, we find profound equality in the Vedic era. In this context, we can mention a verse from the *Vrihadaranyaka Upanishad*:

“*Atha ha Vâcnavī uvâca brahmanâ Bhagabanto hantahamiman dvou  
praśnou.....brahamodyang jeteti ꣳcchâ Gârgī iti*”.<sup>5</sup>

Here, the verse, mentioned above refers to the term ‘Vacaknabī’ is meant the daughter of Vacaknu (great sage) Gargi. Gargi asked him (a brahmin) oh respected Brahmin, if you give me permission, I "may ask two questions. In reply, brahmins gave permission her to asked questions. Hence, this verse mentioned above indicates that it is not only in the present era but also it was very significant in the Vedic period that women should have right to acquire education. So, Swamiji told that there was an equality regarding acquiring education between boys and girls in our ancient educational institute. There was no more equality than it.<sup>6</sup> He rejected any kind of notion which considered women to be inferior to men in intellectual capacity or spiritual potential. He emphasized that both men and women are manifestations of the same divine consciousness and should be treated with equal respect and dignity. He warned that it is completely unfair to discriminate between sexes, as there is no any sex distinction in Atman (Soul); the soul has neither sex, nor caste, nor imperfection. He advised that not to think about men and women, but only that there are human beings. He told to look back into the past we found the glory of women viz. Sita, Savitri, Gargi, Maitrayee and so on are known to us a nature of purity and chastity. But, the beginning of the mediaeval era to colonial era we found women are dominated and exploited by the society. According to him, women must be put in a position, so that they could solve their problems in their own way. His chief aim was of education was man making and character building which is parallelly applicable for both men and women. In this context, here we can mention a quotation from Swamiji - All nations have attained greatness by paying proper respect to women. That country and that nation which do not respect women have never become great, nor will ever be in future.<sup>7</sup>

We think that when Swamiji told regarding the equality about men and women in western countries also are thinking about right to freedom, work, honour, education etc. for women. In this context, we may show here some names who were involved with the revolution for women’s equality, rights etc. viz. Elizabeth Kedi Stanton of America (1815-1902), J. S. Mill of England (1806-1873), Margaret Fuller of France (1810-1850). In later, we find also some supporters of feminism who were played an important role for establishing various rights of women and equality between men and women in the 19<sup>th</sup> century viz. Simone De Beauvoir by her book ‘The

Second Sex' in 1949, Kate Millette by her book 'Sexual Politics', in 1969 and so on. In India, we find some names who were established the rights and equal position women in respect of men viz. Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, Raja Rammohan Roy, Savitribai Phule, Begum Rokeya and so on. Now, let us show the social reforms and empowerment of women in the next chapter.

#### IV

Swamiji had focused on various social issues, including women rights and social reforms. His teachings emphasized the importance of gender equality and the upliftment of women in the society. He realized that without the progress of women no nation can be uplifted. He was a real far-sighted person. Form the medieval era to present era we find that the society is leading by the patriarchy in both western and eastern societies. A question has been arisen by Swamiji- who says that no woman is able to acquire knowledge and devotion? In reply, he says that brahmins declare that no schedule caste or tribe even women also are not eligible to read Vedas, Upanishads etc. This is the root cause of demotion of our society. He also says that there will be no upliftment of any nation where women are not treated as 'mothers' power or worshipped. In this context, he has mentioned a quotation from 'Manusanhita' of great sage Manu in the following:

*“Yatra nāryastu puḡyante ramante tatra devataḥ,  
Yatraitāstu na puḡyante sarvastatrafalakriyah”<sup>8</sup>.*

He told us to follow the character of Sitadevi and Saradadevi as ideal. So, he thought to establish a monastery for women in the bank of the Ganges. There many unmarried and widow women can be stayed as brahmacarini. There will be a school for acquiring all kinds of education like literature, Sanskrit, English, Grammer, religion even, they can learn cooking, swing, home decoration etc. If some of them want to marry, permission will be granted after completion of education above fifteen years. In this manner, women-empowerment will be grown perfectly. Let them self-dependent, they must be able to solve their own problems. This was the keynote speech of SwamiVivekananda for women empowerment. No man will be powerful without help of a real wife or woman. Hence, he used to say that we need both male and female, there is no difference between them. 'We need thousands of men and women who will be spread over the world from Himalaya to Kanyakumari.'<sup>9</sup>

**Critical remarks and conclusion:** It is very true that Swamiji's teachings and vision for women were revolutionary for his time, as he spoke about women empowerment, education, honour, respect, rights etc. His ideas lead us to establish a welfare society. But a question may be arisen here that has really been Swamiji's ideas implemented in later time of him? For uplifting of women Vidyasagar, Madanmohan Tarkalankara, Raja Rammohan Roy etc. had tried to reform the society through the establishing of girl's school, abolished various superstitions like early marriage, self-immolation of Hindu widows, to start widow marriage etc. it was very difficult to reform the society to establish equality of women in respect of men. Though nowadays, we think that women have been acquired the real position in the society, yet till now there we find that women of India are not safe in their not only country or state but also in home. We are seeing that women have been molesting, rape, murdered etc. by men. These unwanted incidents mentioned above prove that till now there no real education is established in the society. We see that a girl grows up under her father at childhood stage, when she becomes adult, lives at the home of her father-in-law under husband, again when she reaches at the stage of old age, lives under her son. So, it is proven that women of India never can enjoy real freedom. Of course, it is also very true that today's women are well-established besides men in respect of earning money, acquiring knowledge, holding all kinds of posts in any work place of any sector. It has been possible by influencing the teaching of Swamiji. Hence, in that course, it may be stated that Swamiji's thinking has been implemented most of all portions in the society. If we follow him more and more there will be no discrimination (gender), respect all the women as mother (living image of power), society will be more uplifted and we have to do it.

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