

## **SWAMI VIVEKANANDA, THE MODERN EDUCATOR**

**Sreyashi Ray Chowdhuri**

Assistant Professor, Dept of History  
Mahitosh Nandy Mahavidyalaya, West Bengal

### **Abstract**

Swami Vivekananda was an outstanding spiritual and intellectual luminary of the modern age. He made certain suggestions on education which are constructive, practical, comprehensive and modern in approach. In the present world of commercialization, international understanding and cultural fellowship these guidelines of Swamiji are very helpful and modern in approach. Thus these views of Swami Vivekananda have been adapted and implemented in the present educational setup with some modifications.

**Key words :** *Self-realization, Faith, Man-making education.*

Swami Vivekananda, formerly known as Narendranath Dutta, was born on 12<sup>th</sup> January 1863. He was an outstanding spiritual and intellectual luminary of the modern age. He was hailed as a person of remarkable insight, dynamic power and wide known ledge. From his meaningful, effective and original ideas embodied in his writings it becomes clear that he made certain suggestions regarding education. The peerless and wandering saint preached his views on education for the service of the humanity. To him education is not merely a means for advancement of knowledge and elimination of ignorance but a sound means of inward vision which will bring social progress and liberation. His philosophy of education is primarily based on the theory of self- discipline which will lead to the advancement of the self. This in the long run will create an advanced society and a developed nation. Thus it can be said that the ideas and guidelines given by Swamiji on education are very modern. The suggestions on education were not only helpful in those days when they were uttered but are extremely relevant today. Hence the guidelines are widely adapted by the modern educators and implemented in the present educational system with some

modifications. This article basically investigates the above dimension of Swamiji's educational thoughts.

In the present world of commercialization man has been reduced to a commodity, a money making machine, full of greed and possessive instincts. There is a severe erosion of moral values prompting degeneration of the nation. To retrieve this situation a possible solution can be to impart education following the vibrant educational philosophy propounded by Swamiji. In this regard it may be said that education is recognized as necessary equipment for all round development of the self which in turn will lead to political and social development. Self development can be brought about by following Swamiji's scheme of education. Swamiji's whole scheme of education is based on the absolute values of truth directed towards self-realization. Infact Swamiji actually wanted to revitalised and revolutionize education by bringing certain changes in the educational process for socio-aesthetic development of the masses. Swami Vivekananda's unparalleled thoughts and suggestions on education undoubtedly promise an enlightened society. Thus in the present socio economic scenario this educational objective should be the call of the hour.

To Swamiji education is the manifestation of 'perfection already in man'<sup>1</sup> and religion is the innermost core of education. He believed that the material and spiritual worlds are inseparable. The objective of education is not to throw away the material as non-spiritual but raise the material world to the Divinity<sup>2</sup>. Therefore religion is a realization of oneness with the Supreme, the *Satchidananda*. This realization creates strength, energy and fearlessness among individuals. In the words of Sister Nivedita, "It is strength we want, not calm. Calm is only a result. It can be cultivated by practice. But if we have strength as the root then calm, peace and steadfastness cannot fail to be its flowers"<sup>3</sup>. Therefore it can be said that he never lost faith in the inherent goodness in man. Though there is negativity in human behaviour as reflected in the society, but the spirit of goodness comes out in all its efflorescence in the long run with the realization of the self. The function of education is to inculcate this goodness in man. In this situation all the imperfections of human behaviour will definitely undergo a change by self control and self enquiry. This will make him efficient to face and overcome all the difficulties of life. This necessitates formation of character which can come through proper education. With this objective in view Swamiji propounded an ideal method for imparting education.

According to Swamiji 'Faith' or "*Sraddha*" is an essential feature of education<sup>4</sup>. He said "To preach the doctrine of *Sraddha* or genuine faith is the mission of my life"<sup>5</sup>. Faith emerges when the student cultivates chastity (*Brahmacharya*) in thought, word and deed<sup>6</sup>. For this it is essential to teach a child the dignity of oneself. In addition to it Swamiji emphasized on continuous discovery of truth to be the focus of true education. He said no compromise should be made with anything that stands in the path of truth. Swamiji said 'Speak out the truth, boldly without any fear that it will puzzle the weak'. This true education will strengthen the mind to face any eventuality. This will make an individual optimistic, dynamic and positive approach towards everything. It will again give strength, confidence and energy to face the challenges of the world in a constructive way. To Swamiji strength and fearlessness are two major characteristics of human personality. In his words "Strength is goodness, weakness is sin"<sup>7</sup>. This doctrine is very helpful in the present world of chaos, confusion & corruption.

Vivekananda rightly opined that the personal influence of the teacher is very great on the student and plays a major role in the character building process. So he advocated residential educational institutions where both can live together and exchange their ideas. The teacher should be efficient enough to discover the shortcomings of the students and lovingly eliminate them<sup>8</sup>. The teacher must be pure in thought and action, spiritually rich and must have the power to transmit his own experience effectively to the students. This erudite guidance propounded by Swamiji is of immense help to the teachers as they are primarily responsible for making the future generation of the country. Swamiji said, "...the true teacher is he who can immediately come down to the level of the student and transfer his soul to the student's soul and see through and understand through his mind. Such a teacher can teach and none else"<sup>9</sup>. Swamiji believed that knowledge is within a child and a teacher like a gardener has to rekindle it or help it to grow by taking away obstacles on its way and only then knowledge comes out of nature. He said "..... you cannot teach a child any more than you grow a plant"<sup>10</sup>. Regarding knowledge he observed "Knowledge is inherent in man, no knowledge comes from outside; what we say a man 'knows' should in strict psychological language be what he 'discovers', or 'unveils'<sup>11</sup>. It must evolve within and not through coercion or compulsion. This approach to education is akin to the heuristic method of modern educational system where the student is looked upon as discoverer and not a passive listener of the lectures delivered by the teacher. Here again we are reminded of Swamiji's guidelines

when he emphasized on the freedom of education from the mechanical dull rote learning. He gave priority to modifications in teaching where the creativity and critical consciousness eliminates all the artificialities in the learning process.<sup>12</sup> Therefore freedom of thought and expression should be encouraged. This approach to education is a very modern concept which has been adopted by the educator of the present day.

Swami Vivekananda always stressed on education for life and not just education for a profession. He said “We want that education by which character is formed, strength of mind is increased, the intellect is expanded and by which one can stand on one’s own feet”<sup>13</sup>. This is a modern concept. He added that education is a training by which will force is strengthened. Such education allows enlightenment and removes darkness and ignorance. Thus it is a life-building, man making, character-building and idea assimilating process<sup>14</sup>. For this education should lay proper emphasis on creativity, originality and excellence which in turn will lead to higher intellect and better personality. So Swamiji boldly suggested that the standard of life should be raised through education of intellect and religion. In this endeavour all the social stigmas and superstitions will be eradicated and will foster social and human development. Moreover real education requires the cultivation of a sense of humility. This sense of humility is the basis of man’s character, the true mark of a balanced personality.<sup>15</sup>

To pursue education for life it must be comprehensive in character. For this Swamiji emphasized on physical culture which would create physical, mental and spiritual strength and overcome any weakness. Swamiji said “...the physically weak are unit for the realization of the self”.<sup>16</sup> We find a unison of thought in the teachings of Plato when he stressed on the role of gymnastic and music in a sound educational system. It is noteworthy to mention that the present educational set up acknowledges the need for physical culture and incorporates physical education as an inseparable part of the curriculum.

Swamiji considered religion as the innermost core of education. Like Swamiji, another educationist Whitehead in this book *The Aims of Education* opined that religion is the essence of education. He suggested that religion is man’s total response to the meaning of existence and education is man’s total preparation for a meaningful effective life. Swamiji further commented that religion is the manifestation of the divinity potential in man and education is the perfection already in man. Thus the two are inseparable and the two are two aspects of the same reality. It should be noted that when Swamiji said religion is the core of

education he did not refer to any particular religion. He actually wanted to mean the essential character of religion which is the realization of the Divinity already in man. Thus he proposed to impart secular knowledge through religion by introducing religious instruction in educational institutes. Now the question arises whether there is scope for giving religious instruction in educational institutes? Here it should be said that India is a secular state and our constitution takes a middle course on the issue of imparting religious instruction. It is stated that while religious instruction is banned in state sponsored educational institutions, it is permitted in other denominational institutions. It may be postulated that since Article 29 guarantees that no Indian citizen shall be denied admission to any state sponsored educational institutes on ground only of religion , race etc, the makers of the Constitution found it impossible to provide religious instruction for pupils following diverse faiths and studying in the same educational institution. However religious instruction is distinguished from research in comparative religion or religious philosophy.

If we delve deep into Vivekananda's conception for religion it can be said that it is not inconsistent with the principle of our Constitution. The Preamble to our Constitution resolves to secure fraternity, dignity of the individual and unity of the nation to the citizens of India. To Swamiji religion teaches dignity of the individual. Dignity arises when man realise himself as a spirit and considers his fellow being as an embodiment of the same spirit. It is not a doctrine performed with rites and rituals or idol worship<sup>17</sup>. Religion that Vivekananda wanted to teach was the religion of *Vedanta* and *Upanishad*. To him *Vedanta* is a religion of strength and hope. Thus it is of great help in strength giving religion and man-making education. If this essence is grasped by the educators then without any harm religious education can be introduced in a state-sponsored educational institution. It is interesting to note that the recommendations of the University Education Commission of India (1948-49) on the subject of religious education are in accordance with Swamiji's scheme.

The Commission mentions "Religion is not identified with a creed to be believed or an emotion to be felt or a ceremony to be performed..... If religion is a matter of realisation, it cannot be reached through mere knowledge of dogmas. It is attained through discipline, training, Sadhana."<sup>18</sup>

Swamiji highlighted that education should be given on national lines. To him unity in diversity is the rule of life. Since religion is dynamic in character, true religion must express

unity in diversity. Swamiji believed that religious education can create national education. This will lead to national integration. In other words if a person is spiritually educated he can expand his heart, give love to others and by doing so eradicate separateness, create unity and bring national integration. With this end in view Vivekananda wanted to build a non-sectarian temple of learning<sup>19</sup> where the pupils will learn the common bond of union among all the religions leaving aside different rituals, customs and traditions. In this context education becomes more dynamic and purposeful and all the pupil feel for a conjoint ambience of social and spiritual advancement. Here it may be added that Swamiji always had great liking for the ‘*gurugrihavas*a system.’<sup>20</sup> Later vivekananda’s ideas reached a crowning success with the establishment of the Ramakrishna Mission and Math at Belur.

Though Swamiji overemphasized on the spiritual basis of education, he never ignored scientific and technological training. He made untiring efforts to harmonise *Vedanta* with Science<sup>21</sup>. He said, “..... 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 themselves and save something against a rainy day”<sup>22</sup>. At Belur Math he urged that students to study the latest researches and critical methods in science and letters as well as religion.<sup>23</sup> Thus by cultivating scientific and technical study, Swamiji wanted to remove superstition and ignorance on one hand and poverty and unemployment on the other. This is again very helpful in the present socio-economic fabric of India.

He wanted to supplement technical education with the study of Humanities, especially the Classics. He believed that the study of Indian Classics will help the students to develop a liking for the Indian culture. In addition to it Swamiji believed that the essence of spirituality is stored in the sacred books of India. Thus these books should be incorporated in the curriculum to make abstract *Advaita* and *Vedanta* more living Swami Vivekananda was in favour of teaching through the medium of the mother tongue of the students. However, he laid great emphasis on the study of Sanskrit<sup>24</sup>. He equated Sanskrit with our cultural heritage and opined that, “Sanskrit words give prestige and power and a strength to the race.”<sup>25</sup>

He also incorporated teaching of Fine Arts in the curriculum. According to Swamiji Fine Arts signified the greatness of a nation. He wanted to combine art and utility. This concept is extremely praiseworthy as it will generate employment on one hand and preserve national heritage on the other.

Vivekananda suggested learning through activity. He advised introduction of dance, drama, singing, storytelling etc in schools and colleges. Other activities may include inter-school and inter-collegiate discussions, excursions, camps, first aid squads, various social service activities etc which will enable the students to learn how to sacrifice personal interests for the sake of the larger interests of the society.<sup>26</sup> In the modern educational set up this guideline has been accepted and implemented in schools and colleges.

Swamiji was in favour of women education. He believed that education would make women fearless and conscious of their chastity and dignity. He proposed a math for the women where religious scriptures, literature, Sanskrit, grammar, rudiments of English and some other subjects like sewing, culinary art, rules of domestic work and upbringing of children may be included.<sup>27</sup> However, he advocated separate maths for women and men and restricted male teachers from teaching female students.

Modern educators are also in favour of extending equal educational opportunities to women. Swamiji justly identified the special aptitude in women besides academic proficiency. Like Swamiji's thoughts, The University Education Commission of India (1948-49) had recommended subjects like Home Economics and Home Management, nursing and Fine Arts for Women Education.<sup>28</sup>

Swamiji always emphasized on the necessity of literate citizens for the advancement of the nation. So he gave top priority to proper education for the upliftment of the masses. He strongly believed that education must be all-pervading and reach every citizen of our country. This 'education for all' approach found an echo in the educational policy of the government named 'Sarva Shiksha Abhijan'.

There is no denying the fact that throughout the ages several methods have been undertaken for the upliftment of the masses. However, Swamiji's suggestions for uplifting the masses through proper education is the most constructive, practical and comprehensive in approach. In the present world national integration, cultural fellowship, international understanding and similar other values are very important. In such a situation Swamiji's views on education have a deeper significance today. Swamiji rightly suggested that education should not be stuffing some facts into the brain of the students but reforming the human mind. So he emphasized the need for a complete re-orientation of human values. It is

an educational scheme to liberate the mind from the bondage of environment, remove cultural isolation and inculcate spirit of enquiry. Thus in accordance to the need of the hour Swamiji's view on education are very apt and have inspired the modern education greatly. The guidelines of Swamiji's has been adapted and implemented in the present educational set up. Hence, it can be stated that Swami Vivekananda's thoughts on education are very relevant in the modern times and should be followed not only for the progress of the child but for the advancement and regeneration of the mankind.

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