

## EDUCATIONAL PHILOSOPHY OF SWAMI VIVEKANANDA

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### **Abstract**

India has a rich tradition of learning and education right from the antiquity. These were handed over generations to generations either through oral or written tradition. The highly esteemed Vedas have come to down to us. The earliest recorded documents on ancient Indian education take us back to the Vedic period, as early as 200 B.C., stretching over to 600 B.C. That was the age of the Vedas, the Upaniṣads and the Aranyakās; the three sacred Scriptures of Hindu religion and Indian philosophy. These constitute what we know as the ‘Smṛuti literature’, the supposed to be divinely revealed scriptures of Hinduism, revealed to the ancient sages. The next important ‘Smṛuti literature’ of Hinduism consists of the two worlds famous Epics: The Rāmāyaṇa and the Mahābhārata, the Purāṇas and the Darṣanās.<sup>1</sup>

It was the knowledge of acoustics that enabled ancient Indians to orally transmit the Vedas from generation to generation. Institutional form of imparting learning came into existence in the early centuries of the Christian era. The approach to learning was to study logic and epistemology. The study of logic was followed by Hindus, Buddhists and Jains, one of the most important topics of Indian thoughts was pramāṇa or means of genuine knowledge. The Nyāya schools upheld four pramāṇās - perception, analogy or comparison, word (Śabda) - pronunciation of a reliable authority such as the Vedas. The Vedanta school added one more to it i.e. intuition. It is probably while studying the process of inference that the schools of true logic arose.

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### **Introduction**

Ancient Indian postulated syllogism though not as accurate as that of Aristotle. Yet, they recognize some of the major fallacies of logic like reduction and absurdum, circular argument, infinite regression, dilemma, and ignorance. In the field epistemology, Jains contributed the most. There were not only two possibilities of existence and non-existence but seven more.

In order to preserve the continuity of this *Vedic* heritage and add to its richness, India built large institutions of higher learning from time to time. They served as the repositories of her spiritual, philosophical, scientific, artistic and literary achievements and as the media of transmission of this heritage to the future generations. But it was realized by the early Vedic seers that the educational institutions could only discharge their functions properly if they were

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<sup>1</sup> Joseph C. Mukalel., *Gandhian Education*, p.34.

isolated from the conflicting demands of the rough and tumble of the world. Therefore, they built their schools in forests, or in places of natural beauty. Nature softens the instincts of body and mind, which otherwise become harsh and aggressive when man lives in houses of brick and mortar. When man lives in the lap of nature, his emotional and mental life becomes pure and harmonious; he grows as a part of life that surrounds him. His inner strains and stresses are reduced to minimum, his mind is alert, his intuition awake. Ancient India, therefore, selected spots of natural beauty for locating their educational institutions, called *āśramās*.<sup>2</sup>

Regarding institutional form of education the first was the *Guru-Śiṣya* system. According to sacred texts, the training of the *Brahmin* pupil took place at the home of a *Brahmin* teacher. In some texts the *guru* is depicted as the poor ascetic and it is the duty of the student to beg for his teacher. The first lesson that was taught to the student was the performance of *sandhya* and also reciting of *gāyatri*. The family functioned as a domestic school, an *āśrama* or a hermitage where the mental faculties of the pupils were developed by the teacher's constant attention and personal instruction. Education treated as a matter of individual concern, did not admit of the method of mass production applicable in industry. The making of man was regarded as an artistic and not a mechanical process. Indeed, the aim of education was the developing of the pupil's personality, his innate and latent capacities. This view of education as a process of one's inner growth and self-fulfilment evolved its own technique, its rules, methods and practices.

True knowledge of God through the *Vedic* Scriptures and directions to the attainment of the same through the practices of the *Vedic* injunctions were central to this period of education. Life and education were not conceived of as separate identities; the two were interwoven into one ultimate aim. The purpose of life and that of education were to attain the knowledge of Brahman, the absolute God. Education during the *Vedic* period was characterized by the *Gurukula* system. The pupils depended on the *guru* for everything. It was an integral development of the pupil's personality. The teacher taught and guided the pupils. The pupils lived in the teacher's family and participated in his day-to-day life and rendered him the kind of help they could. It was learning by experience.<sup>3</sup> In the words of Sri Aurobindo:

“The child's education ought to be an out bringing of all that is best, most powerful, most intimate and living in his nature, the mould into which the man's action and development ought to run is that of his innate quality and powers. He must acquire new things but he will acquire them best, most wholly on the basis of his own developed type and inborn force.”<sup>4</sup>

It is well known fact that the present Indian system of education is completely inadequate due to lack of glorious heritage of India. Educationist from the East and West, are engaged for decades, in devising better methods of imparting knowledge and improving the morale of the student community. Despite their best efforts, the education system was left in deplorable condition, as is generally felt; there is a growing degeneration for there is no place for spiritual aspect of education.

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<sup>2</sup> Kewal Motwani., *India: A Synthesis of Cultures*, p.131

<sup>3</sup> Joseph C. Mukalel., *Gandhian Education*, p.34.

<sup>4</sup> Aurobindo, S., *Essays on the Gita*, p. 319.

**Philosophy of Education:**

According to Swami Vivekananda, "Education is the manifestation of the perfection already in man."<sup>5</sup> Knowledge is inherent in man, no knowledge comes from outside; it is all inside. What we say man 'knows' should, in strict psychological language, be what he 'discovers' or 'unveils.' What a man 'learns' is really what he 'discovers' by taking the cover off his own soul, which is a mine of infinite knowledge. We say Newton discovered gravitation. Was it sitting anywhere in a corner waiting for him? It was in his own mind; the time came and he found it out. All knowledge that the world has ever received comes from the mind; the infinite library of the universe is in your own mind. The external world is simply the suggestion, the occasion, which sets you to study your own mind. The falling of an apple gave the suggestion to Newton, and he studied his own mind. He rearranged all the previous links of thought in his mind and discovered a new link among them, which we call the law of gravitation. It was neither in the apple nor in anything in centre of the earth.

All knowledge therefore, either secular or spiritual, is in the human mind. In many cases it is not discovered, but remains covered, and when the covering is being slowly taken off, and then happens the advance of this process of uncovering. The man from whom this veil is being lifted is the more knowing man; the man upon whom it lies thick is ignorant; and the man from whom it lies has entirely gone is all-knowing, omniscient. Like fire in a piece of flint, knowledge exists in the mind; suggestion is the friction which brings it out. All knowledge and all power are within. What we call powers, secrets of nature, and force are all within. All knowledge comes from the human soul. Man manifests knowledge, discovers it within himself, which is pre-existing, through eternity.<sup>6</sup>

Swami Vivekananda says that no one was ever really taught by another. Each of us has to teach himself. The external teacher offers only the suggestion which rouses the internal teacher to work to understand things. Things will be made clearer to us by our own power of perception and thought, and shall realize them in our own souls.<sup>7</sup> The whole of the big banyan tree which covers acres of ground was in the little seed which was perhaps no bigger than one-eighth of mustard seed. All that mass of energy was there confined. The gigantic intellect, we know, lies coiled up in the protoplasmic cell. It may seem like a paradox, but it is true. Swami Vivekananda says that each one of us has come out of one protoplasmic cell and all the powers we possess were coiled up there. The energy was there, potentially no doubt, but still there. So is infinite power in the soul of man whether he knows it or not. Its manifestation is only a question of being conscious of it.<sup>8</sup>

The reasons for the inadequacy and degeneration are quite obvious, but our savants of education are, for matters of policy and principle, not able to tackle the problems in their entirety. It is singularly fortunate that one such saint-seer of India, Swami Swami Vivekananda, has bestowed his thoughts on this difficult problem and has offered practical solutions, which will facilitate establishing a system that will be a harmonious blending of the culture of India with the scientific methods of the West. The spiritual tradition has been carried on by

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<sup>5</sup> The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda, Vol, IV, p. 358.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., Vol. I, p. 422.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., Vol. I, p. 93.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., Vol, III, p. 339.

contemporary Indian philosophers of education in their integral approach, synthesis of idealism and pragmatism, rationalism and humanism, diversity in unity and harmony of the individual and society.

According to Swami Vivekananda, "Religion is the inner most core of education."<sup>9</sup>

Even in the midst of his cyclonic activities Swami Vivekananda clearly saw the defects of modern education which is a bundle of negations. He observed:

"The education that you are getting now has some good points, but it has a tremendous disadvantage which is so great that the good things are all weighed down. In the first place it is not a man-making education, it is merely and entirely a negative education. A negative education, or any training that is based on negation, is worse than death."<sup>10</sup>

But Swami Vivekananda's argument was not a destructive criticism. He fully visualized the healthy system that is bound to replace the British system of education if India has to survive at all. So he said:

'We must have life-building, man-making, character-making assimilation of ideas.'<sup>11</sup>

This, in fact, is the *summum bonum* of education, an education which should aim at the development of the entire personality of man. Swami Vivekananda has completely comprehended all the aspects of education, not neglecting its main purpose of imparting knowledge. So he has clarified:

"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."<sup>12</sup>

### **Aim of Education:**

The object of the ideal system of education, then, should not merely be the advancement of theoretical knowledge but also the advancement of life, development of the highest powers and capacities and the enfoldment of the noblest potentialities of the student. He must be enabled at the same time to apply intelligently to his own life all the ideas that he has learnt and gathered and thus promote his growth physically, intellectually, morally, and spiritually.

Swami Vivekananda has tackled the problem in its entirety. Unlike those who try to paint and decorate a hopelessly dilapidated building in their vain efforts to make it new, this great son of India has suggested that a glorious mansion should be built on a firmer foundation. That is why he observes:

"Every improvement in India requires first of all an upheaval in religion. Before flooding the land with socialistic or political ideas,

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., Vol. 5, p.161.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., Vol. 3, p.301.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., Vol. 3, p. 302.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

first deluge the land with spiritual ideas. If you attempt to get secular knowledge without religion, I tell you plainly vain is your attempt in India; it will never have a hold on the people.”<sup>13</sup>

Swami Vivekananda, a great thinker and reformer of India, embraces education, which for him signifies ‘man-making’, as the very mission of his life. The basic theme of his philosophy was the spiritual unity of the universe. Sudeep Dutta Roy writes:

“Whether it concerns the goal or aim of education, or its method of approach or its component parts, all his thoughts, we shall observe, stem from this dormant theme of his philosophy which has its moorings in Vedanta.”<sup>14</sup>

Swami Vivekananda realizes that mankind is 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. Conflicts of ideals, manners and habits are pervading the atmosphere. Disregard for everything old is the fashion of the day. Swami Vivekananda seeks the solutions of all these social and global evils through education. With this end in view, he feels the dire need of awakening man to his spiritual self wherein, he thinks, lies the very purpose of education.

### **The Role of Religion:**

In our country people of various language groups, religions and sub-cultures are living together. According to Swami Vivekananda:

“...to the Indian mind there is nothing higher than religious ideals. The Indian mind is first religious, then anything else.”<sup>15</sup>

Yet, the religion which Swami Vivekananda preached is universal in its spirit, comprehensive in its scope and practical and concrete in its application. Religion alone can secure deeper integration for a nation like India. The religion of universality and spiritual brotherhood, including men of all faiths, affirms the unity of existence, the fundamental oneness of reality (*Aitad-atma yam idam sarvam*). It also asserts the divinity of man in his essence. Things are one in their essence, though they appear as many in their manifestations.

Religion is universal. All religions try to define one and the same indefinable Reality. Swami Vivekananda affirms that religions are all alike in that their ultimate purpose is the same. Sri Ramakrishna Guru of Swami Vivekananda practiced the precepts of the different faiths and saw that all are pathways to God. In his spiritual realization he disclosed that ultimate Truth and the God of different religions is one. The spiritual quest is God-ward and the same for all.

As a patriot nationalist, Swami Vivekananda loved India very much and he believed that it has a message for the world and can give spiritual help to the world. He was proud of India’s spirituality.

In order to formulate any true system of education, Vivekananda says that the nature of those who want to be educated should become ideal. It is evident that a human being is not a

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., Vol. 3, p. 302.

<sup>14</sup> Sudeep Dutta Roy., *Education in the Vision of Swami Vivekananda*, p. 23.

<sup>15</sup> Swami Vivekananda., *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda.*, Vol. 3, pp. 287-288.

mass of cells. He is a soul. There is no need to discuss the superiority or otherwise of the different theories as to the true nature of human personality. But it is impossible to formulate any system of education without having a definite conception of the nature, the inner potentialities of the pupil that we want to educate and train. Swami Vivekananda declares:

“Each soul is potentially divine, and the goal is to manifest this divine within.”<sup>16</sup>

He prepares the scheme of this man-making education in the light of his over-all philosophy of Vedanta. According to Vedanta, the essence of man lies in his soul, which he possesses in addition to his body and mind. In true with this philosophy, Swami Vivekananda defines religion as:

“The manifestation of the divinity already in man.”<sup>17</sup>

This self-realization is possible only through education which is ‘the manifestation of perfection already in man’.<sup>18</sup> The attainment of perfection brings out the divine nature. The goal of human existence is to manifest the perfection and divinity of the soul by removing the misconceptions and ignorance which has grown round what is taken to be the personality.

### **The Goal or Objective of Education:**

Swami Vivekananda says that the defect of the present-day education is that it has no definite goal to pursue. A sculptor has a clear idea about what he wants to shape out of the marble block; similarly, a painter knows what he is going to paint. But a teacher, he says, has no clear idea about the goal of his teaching. Swami Vivekananda attempts to establish, through his words and deeds, that the end of all education is ‘man making.’

The aim of education is to manifest in our lives the perfection, which is the very nature of our inner self. This perfection is the realization of the infinite power which resides in everything and every-where-existence, consciousness and bliss (*satchidānanda*). After understanding the essential nature of this perfection, we should identify it with our inner self. For achieving this, one will have to eliminate one’s ego, ignorance and all other false identification, which stand in the way. Meditation, fortified by moral purity and passion for truth, helps man to leave behind the body, the senses, the ego and all other non-self elements, which are perishable. He thus realizes his immortal divine self, which is of the nature of infinite existence, infinite knowledge and infinite bliss.<sup>19</sup>

At this stage, man becomes aware of his self as identical with all other selves of the universe, i.e. different selves as manifestations of the same self. Hence education, in Swami Vivekananda’s sense, enables one to comprehend one’s self within as the self everywhere which is otherwise the *Vedāntic* vision. The essential unity of the entire universe is realized through education. In this context Krishnamachari writes:

“Vivekananda stands for rousing mans to the awareness of his true self. However, education thus signified does not point towards the development of the soul in isolation from body and mind. We have

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 124.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., Vol. 4, p. 358.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Krishnamachari, N., *The Social Philosophy of Swami Vivekananda*, p. 45.



to remember that the basis of Swami Vivekananda's philosophy is Advaita which preaches unity in diversity. Therefore, man making for him means a harmonious development of the body, mind and soul."<sup>20</sup>

In his scheme of education, Swami Vivekananda lays great stress on physical health because a sound mind resides in a sound body. He often quotes the Upaniṣdic dictum 'nayaṃātma balahinena labhyaḥ'; i.e. the self cannot be realized by the physically weak. However, along with physical culture, he harps on the need of paying special attention to the culture of the mind. According to Swami Vivekananda, the mind of the students has to be controlled and trained through meditation, concentration and practice of ethical purity. All success in any line of work, he emphasizes, is the result of the power of concentration. By way of illustration, he mentions that the chemist in the laboratory concentrates all the powers of his mind and brings them into one focus-the elements to be analyzed-and finds out their secrets. Concentration, which necessarily implies detachment from other things, constitutes a part of *Brahmacharya*, which is one of the guiding mottos of his scheme of education. *Brahmacharya*, in a nutshell, stands for the practice of self-control for securing harmony of the impulses.<sup>21</sup>

By his philosophy of education, Swami Vivekananda thus brings it home that education is not a mere accumulation of information but a comprehensive training for life. He remarks that education is not the amount of information that is put into your brain and runs riot there undigested, all your life.' Education for him means that process by which character is formed, strength of mind is increased, and intellect is sharpened, as a result of which one can stand on one's own feet.

#### **The Need for *Brahmacharya*:**

The ancient sages of India held that the highest goal of life could be attained usually by passing through the various stages of life, one after another. Let us focus our attention on the first of them which is very pertinent with the issue with which we are dealing now. It is *brahmacharya*, the period of sense-control including practice of continence, mental discipline and study. A *brahmachāri*, if he wants to take the vow of lifelong celibacy and finds himself fit for it, may remain as a *bramachāri* without entering the family life at all, or, he may take to the life of a hermit or that of a monk. But normally the youth, after he finds himself properly equipped for the struggles of life with its manifold distractions and temptations, should enter the stage of the householder. According to the Hindu ideal, marriage is a sacrament and the household is an *āśrama* - a place not for sense-gratification but for the performance of duties, worship, and service.

During the period of studentship, the foundation of life is to be laid properly. If it fails, later life is also bound to be a failure. That is the reason why great stress is laid on the life of *brahmacharya*. It was so in ancient times and it should be so in the present time also.

#### **Fields of Study**

Swami Vivekananda, in his scheme of education, meticulously includes all those studies, which are necessary for the all-around development of the body, mind and soul of the individual.

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p.47.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p.68.

These studies can be brought under the broad heads of physical culture, aesthetics, classics, language, religion, science and technology. According to Swami Vivekananda the culture values of the country should form an integral part of the curriculum of education. The culture of India has its roots in her spiritual values. The time-tested values are to be imbibed in the thoughts and lives of the students through the study of the classics like *Rāmāyana*, *Mahābhārata*, *Bhagavad-Gīta*, *Vedas* and *Upaniṣads*. This will keep the perennial flow of our spiritual values into the world culture.<sup>22</sup>

Education, according to Swami Vivekananda remains incomplete without the teaching of aesthetics or fine arts. He cites Japan as an example of how the combination of art and utility can make a nation great. Swami Vivekananda reiterates that religion is the innermost core of education. However, by religion, he does not mean any particular kind of it but its essential character, which is the realization of the divinity already in man. He reminds us time and again that religion does not consist in dogmas or creeds or any set of rituals. To be religious for him means leading life in such a way that we manifest our higher nature, truth, goodness and beauty, in our thoughts, words and deeds. All impulses, thoughts and actions which lead one towards this goal are naturally ennobling and harmonizing, and are ethical and moral in the truest sense. It is in this context that Swami Vivekananda's idea of religion, as the basis of education should be understood. We note that in his interpretation, religion and education share the identity of purpose. Why religion forms the very foundation of education becomes clear in his following words:

“In building up character, in making for everything that is good and great, in bringing peace to others and peace to one's own self, religion is the highest motive power, and, therefore, ought to be studied from that standpoint.”<sup>23</sup>

Swami Vivekananda believes that if education with its religious core can invigorate man's faith in his divine nature and the infinite potentialities of the human soul, it is sure to help man become strong, yet tolerant and sympathetic. It will also help man to extend his love and good will beyond the communal, national and racial barriers.

It is a misinterpretation of Swami Vivekananda's philosophy of education to think that he has overemphasized the role of spiritual development to the utter neglect of the material side. Swami Vivekananda, in his plan for the regeneration of India, repeatedly presses the need for the eradication of poverty, unemployment and ignorance. He says, 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 them-selves, and save something against a rainy day. He feels it necessary that India should take from the Western nations all that are good in their civilization. However, just like a person, every nation has its individuality, which should not be destroyed.

The individuality of India lies in her spiritual culture. Hence in Swami Vivekananda's view, for the development of a balanced nation, we have to combine the dynamism and scientific attitude of the West with the spirituality of India. The entire educational program should be so planned that it equips the youth to contribute to the material progress of the country as well as to maintaining the supreme worth of India's spiritual heritage.

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<sup>22</sup> Ranjan, B.R., *Swami Vivekananda*, p. 27.

<sup>23</sup> *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Vol.4, p. 260.



Another important aspect of Swami Vivekananda's scheme of education is women's education. He realizes that if the women of the country get the right type of education, then they will be able to solve their own problems in their own way. The main objective of his scheme of female education is to make them strong, fear-less, and conscious of their chastity and dignity. He observes that although men and women are equally competent in academic matters, yet women have a special aptitude and competence for studies relating to home and family. Hence he recommends the introduction of subjects like sewing, nursing, domestic science, culinary art, etc which was not part of education at his time.

Through his scheme of education, he tries to materialize the moral and spiritual welfare and upliftment of humanity, irrespective of caste, creed, nationality or time. Damodaran, N.B. writes:

“Swami Vivekananda's scheme of education, through which he wanted to build up a strong nation that will lead the world towards peace and harmony, is still a far cry. It is high time that we give serious thought to his philosophy of education and remembers his call to every-body-‘Arise, awake, and stop not till the goal is reached.’”<sup>24</sup>

This paper discusses the Educational Philosophy of Swami Vivekananda. Education, according to Indians, has to include the spiritual aspect because it is accepted as a part of the development of the individual. In fact, Indian thinkers have special emphasis upon this. Even the more recent educationists, some of whose ideas are expressed below, have stressed the importance of the spiritual aspect. According to Swami Vivekananda, “Education is the manifestation of the perfection already in man.” He completely comprehended all the aspects of education, not neglecting its main purpose of imparting knowledge. So he has clarified: ‘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.’

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<sup>24</sup> Damodaran, N.B., *The Great Soul: Swami Vevekananda*, p. 223.