

SWAMI VIVEKANANDA'S CONTRIBUTION TO EDUCATION

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Abstract

Education, according to Swamiji, is 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. 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. 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. He says for the development of a balanced nation, we have to combine the dynamism and scientific attitude of the West with the spirituality of our country. 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.

Key Words: Education, Ramakrishna Mission, Religion, Ethics

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INTRODUCTION

Swami Vivekananda was a great thinker and reformer of India. He was a powerful orator and writer both in English and Bengali. Vivekananda was a singer and a poet, and composed many songs and poems including his favourite Kali the Mother. He was born in an affluent family in Kolkata on 12 January 1863. His pre-monastic name was Narendra Nath Datta. His father, Vishwanath Datta, was a successful attorney and his mother Bhuvaneshwari Devi, was endowed with deep devotion, strong character and had many qualities. He graduated from Calcutta University and acquired a vast knowledge of different subjects, especially Western philosophy and history. He was born with a yogic temperament, and used to practice meditation even from his boyhood. He was associated with Brahmo Movement for some time. After the sudden death of his father in 1884 his family became penniless, and Narendra had to bear the burden of supporting his mother, brothers and sisters. Swami Vivekananda heard about the World's Parliament of Religions to be held in Chicago in 1893. With the funds partly collected by his Chennai disciples and partly provided by the Raja of Khetri, Swami Vivekananda left for America from Mumbai on 31 May 1893. His speeches at the World's Parliament of Religions held in September 1893 made him famous as an 'orator by divine right' and as a 'Messenger of Indian wisdom to the Western world'. After the Parliament, Swamiji spent nearly three and a half years spreading Vedanta as lived and taught by Sri Ramakrishna, mostly in the eastern parts of USA and also in London. He returned to India in January 1897. In response to the enthusiastic welcome that he received everywhere, he delivered a series of lectures in different parts of India, which created a great stir all over the country. Through his inspiring and profoundly significant lectures he attempted:

- to rouse the religious consciousness of the people and create in them pride in their cultural heritage;
- to bring about unification of Hinduism by pointing out the common bases of its sects;
- to focus the attention of educated people on the plight of the downtrodden masses, and to expound his plan for their uplift by the application of the principles of Practical Vedanta.

In June 1899 he went to the West on a second visit and he spent most of his time in the West coast of USA. After delivering many lectures there, he returned to Belur Math in December 1900. The rest of his life was spent in India,

inspiring and guiding people, both monastic and lay. Incessant work, especially giving lectures and inspiring people his health deteriorated and the end came quietly on the night of 4 July 1902. Before his Mahasamadhi he had written to a Western follower: "It may be that I shall find it good to get outside my body, to cast it off like a worn out garment. But I shall not cease to work. I shall inspire men everywhere until the whole world shall know that it is one with God."

ASSOCIATION WITH SRI RAMAKRISHNA

Narendra was assailed by doubts about the existence of God. He first heard about Sri Ramakrishna from one of his English professors at college and in November 1881, he went to meet Sri Ramakrishna who was staying at the Kali Temple in Dakshineswar. He straightaway asked the Master a question which he had put to several others but had received no satisfactory answer: "Sir, have you seen God?" Without a moment's hesitation, Sri Ramakrishna replied: "Yes, I have. I see Him as clearly as I see you, only in a much intenser sense." Apart from removing doubts from the mind of Narendra, Sri Ramakrishna won him over through his pure, unselfish love. Therefore, Narendra now became a frequent visitor to Dakshineswar and, under the guidance of the Master, made rapid strides on the spiritual path. There, Narendra also met several young men who were devoted to Sri Ramakrishna, and they all became close friends. Sri Ramakrishna was diagnosed to be cancer of the throat and he gave up his mortal body in 16 August 1886. After the Master's passing, fifteen of his young disciples began to live together in a dilapidated building at Baranagar in North Kolkata. Under the leadership of Narendra, they formed a new monastic brotherhood, and in 1887 they took the formal vows of sannyasa, thereby assuming new names. Narendra now became Swami Vivekananda. Swamiji, however, wanted to have an inner certitude and divine call regarding his mission. Both of these he got while he sat in deep meditation on the rock-island at Kanyakumari.

After establishing the new monastic order, Vivekananda heard the inner call for a greater mission in his life. Vivekananda realizes that mankind is passing through a crisis. The fundamental principles of civilization are being ignored. Conflicts of ideals, manners and habits are pervading the atmosphere. 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. Vivekananda thought of the Master in relation to India and the rest of the world. As the prophet to spread Sri Ramakrishna's message to the modern world and to India in particular Swamiji, after receiving the blessings of Sri Sarada Devi went out alone into the wide world.

FOUNDATION OF RAMAKRISHNA MISSION AND BELUR MATH

Soon after his return to Kolkata, Swami Vivekananda accomplished another important task of his mission on earth. He founded on 1 May 1897 a unique type of organization known as Ramakrishna Mission, in which monks and lay people would jointly undertake propagation of Practical Vedanta, and various forms of social service, such as running hospitals, schools, colleges, hostels, rural development centres etc, and conducting massive relief and rehabilitation work for victims of earthquakes, cyclones and other calamities, in different parts of India and other countries.

In early 1898 Swami Vivekananda acquired a big plot of land on the western bank of the Ganga at a place called Belur to have a permanent abode for the monastery and monastic Order originally started at Baranagar, and got it registered as Ramakrishna Math after a couple of years. Here he established a new, universal pattern of monastic life which adapts ancient monastic ideals to the conditions of modern life, which gives equal importance to personal illumination and social service, and which is open to all men without any distinction of religion, race or caste. Many people were influenced by Swami Vivekananda's life and message. Some of them became his disciples or devoted friends. Among them the names of Margaret Noble (later known as Sister Nivedita), Captain and Mrs Sevier, Josephine McLeod and Sara Ole Bull, deserve special mention. Nivedita dedicated her life to educating girls in Kolkata. Swamiji had many Indian disciples also, some of whom joined Ramakrishna Math and became sannyasins.

DISCOVERY OF REAL INDIA

Swami Vivekananda was the first religious leader in India to understand and openly declare that the real cause of India's downfall was the neglect of the masses. The immediate need was to provide food and other bare necessities of life to the hungry millions. For this they should be taught improved methods of agriculture, village industries, etc.

Owing to centuries of oppression, the downtrodden masses had lost faith in their capacity to improve their lot. It was first of all necessary to infuse into their minds faith in them. For this they needed a life-giving, inspiring message. Swamiji found this message in the principle of the Atman, the doctrine of the potential divinity of the soul, taught in Vedanta, the ancient system of religious philosophy of India. He saw that, in spite of poverty, the masses clung to religion, but they had never been taught the life-giving, ennobling principles of Vedanta and how to apply them in practical life. Thus the masses needed two kinds of knowledge: secular knowledge to improve their economic condition and spiritual knowledge to infuse in them faith in themselves and strengthen their moral sense. The next question was, how to spread these two kinds of knowledge among the masses? Through education – this was the answer that Swamiji found.

VIVEKANANDA'S CONTRIBUTIONS TO WORLD CULTURE

Making an objective assessment of Swami Vivekananda's contributions to world culture, the eminent British historian A L Basham stated that "in centuries to come, he will be remembered as one of the main moulders of the modern world". Some of the main contributions that he made to the modern world are mentioned below:

1. **Meaning of Religion:** Most significant contributions of Swami Vivekananda to the modern world is his interpretation of religion as a universal experience of transcendent Reality, common to all humanity. According to him religion is as scientific as science itself. Religion and science are not contradictory to each other but are complementary. This universal conception frees religion from the hold of superstitions, dogmatism, and intolerance, and makes religion the highest and noblest pursuit – the pursuit of supreme Freedom, supreme Knowledge, and supreme Happiness.
2. **View of Man:** According to swamiji the present age holds that man should be the chief concern and centre of all activities and thinking. Through science and technology man has attained great prosperity and power, and modern methods of communication and travel have converted human society into a 'global village'. But the degradation of man has also been going on apace, as witnessed by the enormous increase in broken homes, immorality, violence, crime, etc. in modern society.
3. **Principle of Morality and Ethics:** The prevalent morality, in both individual life and social life, is mostly based on fear – fear of the police, fear of public ridicule, fear of God's punishment, fear of Karma, and so on. Vivekananda has given a new theory of ethics and new principle of morality based on the intrinsic purity and oneness of the soul. He says we should be pure because purity is our real nature, we should love and serve our neighbours because we are all one in the Supreme Spirit.
4. **Bridge between the East and the West:** The great contribution of Swami Vivekananda was to build a bridge between Indian culture and Western culture. He did it by interpreting Hindu scriptures and philosophy and the Hindu way of life and institutions to the Western people in an idiom which they could understand. He made the Western people realize that they had to learn much from Indian spirituality for their own well-being. He showed that, in spite of her poverty and backwardness, India had a great contribution to make to world culture. He was India's first great cultural ambassador to the West.

Swamiji taught Indians how to master Western science and technology and at the same time develop spiritually. He has also taught Indians how to adapt Western humanism to Indian ethos.

Important Teachings of Swami Vivekananda: Vivekananda was a great philosopher and a great social reformer. The important teachings of Vivekananda include that;

- Education is the manifestation of the perfection already in man.
- 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.
- So long as the millions live in hunger and ignorance, I hold every man a traitor who, having been educated at their expense pays not the least heed to them.
- My ideal, indeed, can be put into a few words, and that is: to preach unto mankind their divinity and how to make it manifest in every movement of life.

- Whatever you think, that you will be. If you think yourselves weak, weak you will be; if you think yourselves strong, strong you will be.
- If you have faith in gods, and still have no faith in yourselves, there is no salvation for you. Have faith in yourselves, and stand up on that faith and be strong; that is what we need.
- Strength, strength it is that we want so much in this life, for what we call sin and sorrow have all one cause, and that is our weakness. With weakness comes ignorance, and with ignorance comes misery.
- The older I grow, the more everything seems to me to lie in manliness. This is my new Gospel.
- Purity, patience, and perseverance are the three essentials to success, and above all, love.
- Religion is the manifestation of the Divinity already in man.
- Religion is realization; not talk, not doctrine, nor theories, however beautiful they may be. It is being and becoming, not hearing or acknowledging; it is the whole soul becoming changed into what it believes.
- Teach yourselves, teach everyone his real nature, call upon the sleeping soul and see how it awakes. Power will come, glory will come, goodness will come, purity will come, and everything that is excellent will come when this sleeping soul is roused to self-conscious activity.
- They alone live who live for others, the rest are more dead than alive.
- This is the gist of all worship – to be pure and to do well to others.
- It is love and love alone that I preach, and I base my teaching on the great Vedantic truth of the sameness and omnipresence of the Soul of the Universe.
- Vivekananda believed a country's future depends on its people; his teachings focused on the development of the mass. He wanted "to set in motion machinery which will bring noblest ideas to the doorstep of even the poorest and the meanest." Vivekananda believed that the essence of Hinduism was best expressed in the Vedanta philosophy, based on the interpretation of Adi Shankara.

The first governor general of independent India, Chakravarti Rajagopalachari, said "Vivekananda saved Hinduism, saved India." According to Subhas Chandra Bose, a major proponent of armed struggle for Indian independence, Vivekananda was "the maker of modern India". Many years after Vivekananda's death, Rabindranath Tagore told French Nobel Laureate Romain Rolland, "If you want to know India, study Vivekananda. In him everything is positive and nothing negative." Rolland himself wrote that "His words are great music, phrases in the style of Beethoven, stirring rhythms like the march of Handel choruses.

MEANING OF EDUCATION

Vivekananda points out 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. Swamiji attempts to establish, through his words and deeds, that the end of all education is man making. He prepares the scheme of this man-making education in the light of his over-all philosophy of Vedanta. He defines education as 'the manifestation of the perfection already in man.' 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. 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.

Vivekananda lays great stress on physical health because a sound mind resides in a sound body. According to him, 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, which necessarily implies detachment from other things, constitutes a part of celibacy, which is one of the guiding mottos of his scheme of education. He thus brings it home that education is not a mere accumulation of information but a comprehensive training for life. To quote him: '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.

METHOD OF TEACHING

According to Vivekanand, knowledge is inherent in every man's soul. What we mean when we say that a man 'knows' is only what he 'discovers' by taking the cover off his own soul. Consequently, he draws our attention to the fact that the task of the teacher is only to help the child to manifest its knowledge by removing the obstacles in its way. In his words: 'Thus Vedanta says that within man is all knowledge even in a boy it is so and it requires only an awakening and that much is the work of a teacher.' Vivekananda's method of education resembles the heuristic method of the modern educationists. In this system, the teacher invokes the spirit of inquiry in the pupil who is supposed to find out things for himself under the bias-free guidance of the teacher. He gives too much emphasis on the environment at home and school for the proper growth of the child. The parents as well as the teachers should inspire the child by the way they live their lives. Swamiji recommends the old institution of gurukula (living with the preceptor) and similar systems for the purpose. In such systems, the students can have the ideal character of the teacher constantly before them, which serves as the role model to follow.

Although he is of the opinion that mother tongue is the right medium for social or mass education, yet he prescribes the learning of English and Sanskrit also. While English is necessary for mastering Western science and technology, Sanskrit leads one into the depths of our vast store of classics. The implication is that if language does not remain the privilege of a small class of people, social unity will march forward unhampered.

CURRICULUM

According to Vivekanand, 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. He, 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. These studies can be brought under the broad heads of physical culture, aesthetics, classics, language, religion, science and technology. The time-tested values are to be imbibed in the thoughts and lives of the students through the study of the classics like Ramayana, Mahabharata, Gita, Vedas and Upanishads. This will keep the perennial flow of our spiritual values into the world culture.

According to him the main objective of women 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 were not parts of education at his time.

CONCLUSION

He realizes that it is only through education that the uplift of masses is possible. Education brings to light its constructive, practical and comprehensive character. He states it emphatically that if society is to be reformed, education has to reach everyone-high and low, because individuals are the very constituents of society. The sense of dignity rises in man when he becomes conscious of his inner spirit, and that is the very purpose of education. He strives to harmonize the traditional values of India with the new values brought through the progress of science and technology. It is in the transformation of man through moral and spiritual education that he finds the solution for all social evils. Founding education on the firm ground of our own philosophy and culture, he shows the best of remedies for today's social and global illness. He tried to materialize the moral and spiritual welfare and upliftment of humanity, irrespective of caste, creed, nationality or time.

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