



SWAMI VIVEKANANDA : SOME REFLECTIONS ON EDUCATION

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Introduction

The 19th century India produced a galaxy of great men who have enriched our national life by their talent and personality. Swami Vivekananda was one of them. Vivekananda believed in essential unity of man and God. He was an eclectic educationalist too. He tried to unite Indian spirituality and western materialism. He desired happy mingling or fusion of the two. He also wanted to unite Para Vidya and Apra Vidya. He was revolutionary in the field of education and touched every aspect of it. His ideas on various aspects of education are more relevant and are needed more today than probably during his life time. Although Vivekananda did not write a book on education, he contributed valuable thoughts on the subject of education that are relevant and viable today. He had firm moorings in oriental culture, yet he had the broadness to welcome all that is worth borrowing from the west (Ghosal, 2012). No wonder that today, over a century after his death, we still try to enrich ourselves with the gems of Vivekananda's thoughts on education. If we attentively study the writings and lectures of Vivekananda, we will find that his views on education are products of original reflection. Let us discuss the different aspects of Vivekananda's scheme of education.

Defining Education

Swamiji who describes religion as 'the manifestation of the divinity already in man' defines education as 'the manifestation of the perfection already in man' (1993 : 55). First of all, the word '**manifestation**' implies that something already exists and is waiting to be expressed. The main focus in learning is to make the hidden ability of a learner manifest. According to him, knowledge is inherent in man, not acquired from external sources. Like sparks in a flint, knowledge is potentially there in human mind. The stimulus of education causes the friction that ignites the fire of knowledge. It is the unfolding of the petals of one's own mind. 'Manifestation' indicates spontaneous growth, provided that the impediments, if any, are removed. Vivekananda said "what a man learns is really what he 'discovers', by taking the cover off his own soul, which is a mine of infinite knowledge" (1993 : 54).



Next in importance in the Swami's definition of education is the expression '**already in man**'. This refers to a human being's potential, which is the range of the abilities and talents, known or unknown that is born with. 'Potential' speaks of the possibility of awakening something that is lying dormant (Prabhananda, 2003).

The word '**perfection**' in the Swami's definition of education is also very significant. The Greek word 'teleics' translated as 'perfect', and suggests the idea of attaining a goal or an end. The English word 'perfect' implies completion, or something being made whole. Again, we can see that every act connected with learning, training etc. is part of a process directed towards an end. Drawing on these meanings, one may conclude that perfection in education parlance is the goal of actualizing the highest human potential.

Swami Vivekananda also defines education as "life-building, man-making, character-making assimilation of ideas", and not a certain "amount of information that is put into your brain and runs riot there, undigested all your life" (1985; III : 302). Education is not mere book-learning (V : 231), nor passing examinations, not even delivering impressive lectures (VII : 147), It is an ability to think originally, to stand on your own feet mentally as well as practically, interacting with people successfully. This calls for a right and pragmatic approach. 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.

Thus, according to Vivekananda, education is the discovery of the inner self i.e. self revelation. It is not an imposition on the individual of certain borrowed ideas from the external sources, but a natural process of enfoldment of all the inherent powers which lie in dormant condition in an individual. Education is development from within. His thoughts on education ought to be seriously re-examined today.

Vivekananda is sceptical about the system of education where the learner's mind gets jam-packed with information without having any space for independent thinking. He clears up all confusing misconception in this regard with a witty remark : "If education is identical with information, the libraries are the greatest sages of the world (1993 : 56).. Regrettably, turning our back upon the instruction of this great master even today we treat innocent learners as nothing better than vessel to be stuffed with cartload of facts with little scope for exploring their hidden potentials.

The Objectives of Education

Vivekananda points out that the defect of the present-day education is that it has no definite goal to pursue. A sculpture has a clear idea about what he wants to shape out of the marble block; similarly, 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. 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, Swamiji 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 (Satchidananda). 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.

Education he maintains, should help people to build up self-confidence and self reliance, based on balanced human relationships. The ultimate goal of all educational effort is to strive towards character development characterized by the development of will-power, leading to courage, stamina and fearlessness. Through education the individual should develop adaptability and able to meet the challenge of a changing society, and this can be able through education and training that he or she receives from his parents and teachers. Education should lead to a feeling of brotherhood and the unity of mankind. According to Swami Vivekananda, work is worship, so to serve the masses is to serve God, so education should lead us to recognize this and to fulfil this end. Education should lead us to acquire the spirit of renunciation.

Method of Teaching

Having analysed the goal or objective of education, the next question that naturally arises is about the method of imparting education. According to him, 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. To drive his point home, he refers to the growth of a plant. Just as in the case of a plant, one cannot do anything more than supplying it with water, air and manure while it grows from within its own nature, so is the case with a human child. 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. Anticipating the much acclaimed modern, student-centred method of learning where the teacher plays the role of a facilitator, Vivekananda asks the teacher to come down to the level of the learner and 'give him a push upwards'. So there should be least intervention and the ideal teacher should



consciously under-teach so that the learners get ample scope for learning themselves : ‘No one can teach anybody. The teacher spoils everything by thinking that he is teacher’ (1993 : 56).

Role of Teacher

It is true that today’s education does not produce properly developed personalities having faith, hope, confidence, motivating power, balanced outlook on life, conscious of their rights as well as their duties. The reason does not lie with the youth or with their mind as such as but with the agencies responsible for moulding a person’s character—parents, teachers, social conditions in which he/she grows, and the system of education to which we trust his/ her future. Our schools and universities still continue to be merely examining bodies (V: 224) turning out mechanically every year in huge numbers men and women destitute in faith and poor in culture – in the knowledge of our ancient literature, arts (V: 364 : 5) unable to think originally (V : 224), incapable of standing on their own feet (VII : 147), and virtually untouched by religion which Swami Vivekananda regarded “the innermost core of education” (V : 232). The teacher should share with the student the conviction that they are both truly one in Spirit – at the same time cultivating in the student a feeling of dignity and self-respect”. As Vivekananda said “The only 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 the student’s eyes and hear through his ears and understand through his mind. Such a teacher can really teach and none else” (IV : 183).

The ideal of all education or training is to make the mind grow (II : 15). Knowledge exists in the mind, like fire in a piece of flint. Friction brings it out (I : 26). Swami Vivekananda believed that “Education is the manifestation of the perfection already in man” (1970 :438), therefore, a teacher’s job is only to remove obstruction from the pupil’s path. What we call learning is actually ‘unfolding’ or ‘unveiling’. Each of us is naturally growing and developing according to our own nature. The children teach themselves. They grow by themselves like plants from within (II :385). Our duty is to offer them opportunity and remove obstacles; that is , if we provide conducive environment the rest will happen by itself. The teacher’s role is not unimportant . It necessitates the teacher’s personal, constant contact with the student. The student must live with his / her teacher like in the Upanishadic times (V : 224). And the teacher, on his / her part, has to undergo a proper training to equip himself / herself better for his / her task.

All Round Development

Although Swami Vivekananda’s vision of education lays extreme emphasis on the training of the mind it does not undermine the importance of an all-round



development of the human personality. Its aim is the untrammled development of the personality in all sphere – physical, mental and spiritual.

In this scheme of education, Swamiji lays great stress on physical health because a sound mind resides in a sound body. He often quotes the Upanishadic dictum ‘*nayamatma balahinena labhyah*’; the self cannot be realized by the physically weak. Accordingly, he recommends that physical exercise of some kind or the other must form part of an educational training. The mind acts on the body and the body acts on the mind (VI : 39). They run parallel to each other (VII : 172). However, along with physical culture, he harps on the need of paying special attention to the culture of the mind. According to Swamiji, 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. 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. By his philosophy of education, Swamiji thus brings it home that education is not a mere accumulation of information but a comprehensive training for life.

Women’s Education

Like Vidyasagar, Vivekananda also stresses the importance of women education. Swami Vivekananda did not preach two different kind of scheme for educating men and women. His teaching was exactly the same without any discrimination (V : 232). Nevertheless, his views on women call for a separate treatment, just as his plea not to monopolise all education for the benefit of a handful of people. He maintains that society of literacy among women. With a brilliant flight metaphor Vivekananda explains the point about how female illiteracy retards the progress of a society : ‘It is not possible for a bird to fly on only one wing’ (1993: 69).

He realizes that if the women of our country get the right type of education, then they will be able to solve their own problems in their own way. The main objectives 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 were not part of education at his time.



Medium of Instruction

As regards to medium of instruction, Vivekananda strongly advocated for mother-tongue. He a true nationalist, and a champion of national education argued instruction through mother-tongue. He visualized to Indianise Indian education. He also wanted to spread mass education through mother-tongue so that it will reach to everyone.

Although Swamiji is of the opinion that mother tongue is the right medium for social or mass education, 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.

Fields of Study

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. These studies can be brought under the broad heads of physical culture, aesthetics, classics, language, religion, science and technology. According to Swamiji, 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 Ramayana, Mahabharata, Gita, Vedas and Upanishads. This will keep the perennial flow of our spiritual values into the world culture. Education, according to Swamiji, 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. Swamiji 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 action 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 Swamiji'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.

Conclusion

The exposition and analysis of Vivekananda's scheme of education brings light its constructive, practical and comprehensive character. He realizes that it is only



through education that the uplift of masses is possible. 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. 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. However, 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 everybody – 'Arise, awake and stop not till the goal is reached'.

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