

# Where education is a man making process - Revisiting swamiji's thoughts

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## ABSTRACT

Having emerged during the colonial regime of British Bengal, Swami Vivekananda, one of the great seers, bore himself the brunt of liberating the superstitious human minds by the mantra of education integrated with the power of spiritualism. To prepare the manifesto inscribing the purpose, nature and methods of education, to promote education to all strata of society, especially to women, were his cardinal humanist preoccupations. He brought about a renaissance in the then staggering Indian education system by sternly criticizing its decline in standard, both qualitative and quantitative. Mere bookish education, to him, was meaningless unless it has utility on the whole in terms of social development and reformation, strengthening self-righteousness, intelligence and above all the formation of inner 'self'. In this regard, he stressed on the role of religion in manifesting the power of inner 'self' through spiritual awakening. His principles on spiritualism strengthen self-confidence to fight against poverty, injustice and fear. For the betterment of *body-mind-soul*, he proposed the important roles of physical education, religion, science and technology, ancient literature and language. This paper attempts to undertake a critical take on education policies and strategies proposed by Swami to unleash the hidden power of Indian minds, of both men and women, urban and rural, to eradicate the shackles of colonialism, superstition, illiteracy.

**Key Words:** Colonialism, Superstition, Spiritualism, Education, Illiteracy.

## INTRODUCTION

At the fall of 19<sup>th</sup> century and the dawn of 20<sup>th</sup> century, the birth of Vivekananda was one of the most significant incidents in Indian national and social scenario. Shattered and staggering under the long colonial regime, the education system during that period, to the Bengalis, was nothing more than mere securing clerical posts. At this juncture (still 50 years for India to be independent), the emergence of Vivekananda with an avant-garde philosophy of education was indeed a significant breakthrough. His stern advocacy for spiritual education was a novel dimension to the squalid system of education. He vehemently called for a reformation to the existent system in relation to diverse perspectives – its objectives, natures and methods. His argumentation on behalf of public education and education for women created complementation and controversies alike. He vituperated the decadence of learning during the colonial regime in India. To him, real education nurtures and strengthens our moral values to stand in defiance against all sorts of problems in our life. His chief purpose was to lay bare the pragmatic gains of education. The acquiring of good grades in exams and entitlement or conferment of degrees by means of bookish or academic excellence were not the 'true' objectives of education to him, unless that hard-earned knowledge could not be practically utilized for the betterment of the lives of fellow countrymen and development of society. His famous dictum "education is the manifestation of perfection which is already in man" has not yet been a cliché; it still stimulates our nerves with equal verve as it used to do in pre-independent colonized Bengal. His assertion was on building our behavior, strengthening our mind and achieving self-confidence. His emphatic proposal for the juxtaposition of Western science and Eastern Vedanta was highly appreciative new approach. The cardinal goal of learning lies in the attainment of learners of the Gnostic power and confidence to seek out solutions to their life-threatening problems. In this regard, he opines that religion plays a crucial role. By 'religion', he means not mere engagement with the activities of praying and preaching of religious dogmas and tenets. Rather his emphasis is broader – the awakening of 'self' by means of spiritual power which tends to enlighten the human mind and heighten the standards of morality. According to him, 'we' (Indians in general and Bengalis in particular) are the real teachers of spiritual education. However, his discussion of spiritualism does not simply refer to 'yoga' – the act of meditation to achieve psychosomatic nonchalance. Rather its teaching enables us to battle against injustice, poverty and fear. This philosophy of spiritualism sustains our self-confidence which the colonial system of education in India, especially Bengal lacked. Due to an overwrought impact of British culture, a group of xenomaniac Bengalis was content with mere clerical posts compromising with educational ethics. Contrarily, Swamiji proposed for public education and education of both body and mind to build self-reliant, honest and refined sentient who would resuscitate the nation from a decadent condition.

Apart from the nature and aim of education, he also laid down its prospective methods. To him, the learner's desire for learning must evolve from self. Vedantic philosophy argues that human mind is a deep reservoir of knowledge, education only manifests it. However, in his disquisition, Vivekananda emphasized more on science than on religion as the former is more pragmatic in approach regarding the development. He was also well aware of dark side realism that an empty stomach can neither be educated nor be indoctrinated. Only a liberal heart can bring about dynamism in the perspectives of human thinking. In his opinion, physical exercise, religion, science and technology, ancient literature and language should be the sine qua non in curriculum of educational system. Having inspired by the ethical goals of education in ancient Greece, Vivekananda, too, promoted the importance of physical exercise for equilibrium of both body and mind. Furthermore, he point out the necessities of aesthetic and creative thinking without which the growth of spiritual power is impossible. To illustrate his argument, he cites the instance of Japanese culture whose expertise in creative arts have hastened their overall progress. The best possible way to acquaint with a nation's culture and traditions is to study its classical literary canons. Similarly, he was of the opinion that if the present generation of India remains unaware of its rich literary, cultural and religious traditions and values, then how could they respect towards the heritage of their motherland and feel passionate to represent her in global scale. It is not untrue that the application of mother tongue is the best means for public education, but additional knowledge of other languages helps to acquaint with diverse cultures as India is a composite of variety of cultures, religions and languages. For this liberal thinking, Vivekananda adjudicated the importance of learning English in India.

At the same time, womenfolk of Bengal were in worst condition. Their uneducated and superstitious minds exacerbated their deprivation, polarization and marginalization in social, political, economic spheres of life. Where Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar and Raja Rammohan Roy were pioneering in the restoration of women rights through social reformatory movements like the abolishment of child-marriage and forceful immolation of widows on the burning pyre, and legislation of re-marriage of young widows; Vivekananda pre-occupied himself in propagating desperately about the need of education for women. He was deeply appalled by the misery of Bengal women – the same Bengal who had mothered earlier daughters like Gargi, Maitreyi, Apala, or Khana. Only education can liberate them from their present plight. He also talked about an equality of positions between men and women in all sphere of life as it had been in the era of Vedas and Upanishads. For, he was apprehensive that the biased gender inequality would hamper in the overall progress of the nation in future. He did not differentiate between men and women regarding their potentialities in either physical or spiritual realms of life. He proposed for an ideal woman who would be an amalgam of two parallel forms – spiritual mother (of Orient) and physical wife (of Occident).

In pre-independent India, his proposed system of education sought to reinstate among the contemporary learners about the traditions of ancient India. He also emphasized on the requirement of a community of student-friendly teachers whose holistic engagement would be in the amelioration of students and society. This combined effort would inevitably create a generation of leaders who being kind, refined, just, virtuous and able-bodied, would unwaveringly and wholeheartedly dedicate themselves in the tasks of developing and leading India in every aspect to the topmost level in the world. Finally, Swamiji-led education is neither institutionalized nor age-restricted. He argues that just as only the repeated rubbing of flints results in the production of fire, similarly, education nurtures and nourishes the shapeless perfection inhibiting in our mind, more specifically, 'soul'.

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