

Swami Vivekananda's thoughts on Women Empowerment through Education in 19th Century and its Relevance in Present System of Education

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Abstract

19th century mother India has produced a galaxy of great men who have enriched our national life by their talent and personality. Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902) was one among them. When cultural values and deep-rooted civilization of India were crushed under the western civilization based on materialism, a wandering monk Vivekananda with no material possession except his walking stick and begging bowl with full surrender to Almighty, became her messiah. Popularization of women education in India owes much to Vivekananda, because he said that the fate of India will be sealed if the mothers are not given proper education and training. By this, he visualized better home, better people, better society and developed nation at large (Nayak, 2013). According to Swamiji women education would be a combination of the western spirit of the independence, freedom and dynamism with Indian austerity and purity. His suggested some subject areas are religion, science, arts, language, housekeeping, cooking, sewing, hygiene etc. Women to be specially imparted religious education (Maity, 2016). Therefore, this paper will study about Swami Vivekananda's thoughts and ideas on women education, different subject areas for women education in 19th century and evaluate its relevance in present system of education. The methodology followed in this study is analytical and evaluative. The thoughts and ideas of Swami Vivekananda regarding women education is bearing a great significance in the field of our education system and society for women empowerment in 19th century and also present time. It's providing the right type of education to emancipate them through re-establishing their dignified position in society. And this paper will suggest recommendations in consideration with Swami Vivekananda's vision, to overcome the problem of illiteracy among women in present India.

Keywords: Swami Vivekananda, Women, Empowerment, Education, Relevance.

Introduction

“The best thermometer to the progress of a nation is its treatment of its women.”

- Swami Vivekananda

Progress of a country cannot be possible without educational development of the women community of the society. Due to this, our primary step is to strengthen the educational status of our women community who belong in the marginalized group and constitute half of the total population. Women are

the mothers of the race, gradients of future generation, active agents of social change and builder of the society.

Swami Vivekananda who was an international figure, great thinker and reformer of India realizes and gives stresses on the women of the family as well as of the nation, girls or women education immensely influence fertility rate, infant mortality, population growth, marriage age, life expectancy and rational productivity. He said “Education is not the amount of information that is put into your brain and runs riot there, undigested all your life. We must have life-building, man making, character making and assimilation of ideas. 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.” Swami Vivekananda is one of the famous philosopher as well as educationist in the history of Indian education. His educational thoughts and ideas have been influenced by his philosophy of life. Swami Vivekananda believed in the Vedanta philosophy which considers that the ultimate goal of human life is to attain ‘Unity with the Creator’ (Ghosh, 2013). To explain his thought about women education Swamiji remarked “There is no change for the welfare of the world unless the condition of women is improved”. He repeatedly told that Indians downfall was largely due to her negligence of women and to solve this problem he suggested proper women education. Swamiji found education as the best and only device to solve all problems of women and thereby liberate them (Dey, Kepchachaki & Roy, 2015).

Objectives of the study

1. To study of the Swami Vivekananda’s thoughts and ideas about women education for women empowerment.
2. To study of different subject areas for women education according to Swami Vivekananda for women empowerment.
3. To evaluate the relevance of Swami Vivekananda’s thoughts and ideason women education for women empowerment in present system of education.

Methodology of the study

The methodology followed in this study is analytical and evaluative. The study has analyzed Vivekananda’s thought and ideas on women education for women empowerment. Also the study has evaluated the relevance of his thought and ideals in present time.

Swami Vivekananda’s thoughts and ideas on Women Education

No country can be prosperous and cultured unless its women community is well-cared for. For this, he became an ardent vocalist of women education, women’s chastity is a strength and vitality for reaching their perfect women-hood. Girls should be provided ideal education to be ideal women. It would be very good if some women get training for renunciation that would be able to cause and contribute a great deal to the development of women as well as the nation at large. Women education is not in the hands of others, the power lies in the women (C.W. vol. 5: pp. 231). Vivekananda considered that women to be the incarnation of power and asked men to respect them everywhere. He rightly pointed out that unless Indian women secure a respectable place in this country, the nation can never march forward. The important features of his scheme of female education are to make them strong, fear-less, and conscious of their chastity and dignity. He insists that men and women are equally competent not only in the academic matters, but also must have equal companion in the home and family. Vivekananda being a

keen observer could distinguish the difference in perception about the status of women in the West and in India. “The ideal women in India is the mother, the mother first, and the mother last. The word woman calls up to the mind of the Hindu, motherhood; and God is called mother.” (Ghosh, 2013)

Vivekananda championed the cause of women’s education and their emancipation. He was highly impressed to see the women of the progressive countries (America, England and Japan) working with men and thereby contributing immensely to the national advancement. He was greatly pained at the miserable condition of women in India. Swamiji sincerely believed that a nation could rise only by paying proper respect to women and raising their status. He says, “There is no hope of rise for that family or country where there is no education of women, where they live in country where there is no education of women, where they live in sadness. For this reason, they have to be raised first”. (Mondal, 2015) Vivekananda was in favour of the ideal of chastity for women. To him, Sita is a symbol of purity. Indian women, therefore, must be taught to follow the ideal of Sita. Swamiji says “Oh, India, do not forget the ideal of womanhood – Sita, Sabitri and Damayanti”. He had full faith in the Indian culture and virtues of our domestic living. He favoured women education on Indian lives and not on Western lives. His idea of women’s education included ideal daughters, ideal wife and ideal mother. He put forth the ideal of lives of great Indian women such as Sita and Sabitri, Mira Bai and Ahalya Bai. He also wanted to make Indian women fearless and brave to face successfully the realities of life. He also recommends a modest curriculum for them which includes history, science education, Puranas, housekeeping, sewing and other domestic arts. Ideal women must learn the duties of home-life. He, of course, discarded blind imitation of the West. (Purkait, 2014. P. 422)

Different Subject Areas of Women Education proposed by Swami Vivekananda

Swami Vivekananda supported the indigenous of traditional system of education in which the history and culture of one’s own nation would be taught. He was against the unfamiliar model of education. He told that the mind of an individual is an infinite reservoir of knowledge, and all knowledge of past, present and future within the individual is manifested or non-manifested. The aim of every system of education should be to help the mind to manifest it. For this he insisted on the old system of education, for females. (Mondal, 2015)

He said about the women education, ‘their education must be an eye-opener in all matters’ and to satisfy this objective he emphasized on the study of different important subjects areas. Because subjects and activities which foster material welfare with spiritual advancement. These subjects are -

1. **Religion:** it’s for ethical and spiritual life. Women to be specially imparted religious education.
2. **Science and Vedanta:** a happy blending between science which considers matter real and true and the Vedanta which considers spirit real and true has been inherent in the content areas suggested by him.
3. **Social Science:** different subjects of social science like History, Geography, Economics, Home Science etc. are suggested in order to enable the students lead a happy and successful social life.
4. For spiritual advancement he prescribed religion, **Philosophy, Upanishads**, company of saints and their preaching.
5. **Languages:** For material advancement and prosperity, he recommended different languages. In order to establish a common communication of ideas among the people, different languages are to be taught to women. Like Sanskrit occupies a strategic place in his scheme of education, regional

language or mother-tongue should be taught to women because it helps them to acquire knowledge quickly and easily, and also study English language

6. **Physical Education:** a strong body and healthy physique is the capital for undertaking any sort of activity successfully. He told that a physically strong man is able to realize the 'self. He wanted to see people with muscles of iron and nerves of steel. For this, physical education, exercise, yoga, drill, Sports etc. are to be incorporated in the subject areas.
7. **Fine Art, Music, Painting etc.:**women are required to develop a positive attitude towards God's creation and beauty. For this, he recommended the inclusion of fine art, drama, music, painting, etc.
8. **Vocational Education:** for the process of economic development of people in general and amelioration of economic condition of the poor in particular, he suggested the study of vocational or professional subjects. According to him, education should help individual to be self-supporting. He favoured training in agriculture, craft, cottage industries, housekeeping, cooking, Sewing, Hygiene etc. (Nayak, 2013). Along with these he also suggested Japa, Worship and Meditation which formed and indispensable part of teaching.

Relevance of Swami Vivekananda's thoughts and ideason Women Education for Women Empowerment in Present system of Education

Vivekananda felt that modern education all over the world has so far concentrated on the 'learning to do' aspect and not on the 'learning to be' faculties of education. He says that education must focus on the requirement of the human mind. His philosophy of education is based on universal principles of morality and ethics. He wanted to teach the common masses of India the ideals of synthesis, tolerance and universal harmony. His philosophy gives equal importance to the claims of spirit and matter. To him diversity is as real as unity. Matter is only 'veiled spirit'. Thus he creates a metaphysical synthesis reconciling the claims of spirit and matter, and makes it one of the chief bases of its philosophy of education. (Dey, Kepchachaki& Roy, 2015)

Vivekananda's thought and ideals have a strong commitment to the women empowerment and he had great concern with the oppression of women in the contemporary Indian society. Women are empowered when they become aware of the unfair power relations they face and are able to take the challenge to overcome inequality through making themselves as self-confident. Empowerment enables women to take control over their lives and builds self-confidence and self-reliance. He tried to raise awareness, develop and women empowerment not only through education but also by enlightening them through the philosophy of Indian spiritualism which might be considered as an effective system of approach in the process of empowering women. The educating women will gain courage, confidence and self-respect and will liberate them from the sense of dependency and a life of subservience. (Maity, 2016)

Vivekananda's two primary ideals of education are: a) Individualistic internalization of education, and b) Searching for and awakening of active enlightenment. This attempt is to search for the power and strength inherent in oneself. And his thoughts, ideas and activities regarding the awakening of empowered women force and education of women were always prompted by his firm conviction in this potentiality of education of stimulating the self-reliant self and kindling a kind of conscious enthusiasm. Women must find strength from within. (Kumar, 2015) Vivekananda realized that right type of education is very important for females in our country because once they get right type of education; they will be in a position to solve their own problems. He arranged a separate subject areas which includes – (i) Moral Value and Philosophy (ii) Literature and Language (iii) Religion(iv) Science and

Social Science (v) Vocational Education like Craft, Sewing, Housekeeping and Cooking (vi) Fine Arts, Music and Painting etc. with Yopa, Worship, Meditation. Then, they can develop high character, courage and confidence. The modern period just revised this curriculum and subject areas became modified such as introduction of Home-Science, Work-Education, Physical Education and other Vocational courses in school syllabus. In order to involve women efficiently in the modern Indian economy, self-employment and skill-training initiatives are needed. Emphasizing Yoga according to Swamiji’s recommendation, the modern school of Yoga and Meditation have got importance through the United Nations General Assembly’s declaration of 21st of June as an International Yoga Day on 11th of December in 2014, accepting the present Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s proposal. Without perfect Brahmacharya, an individual cannot have substantial spiritual progress and empowerment. There is no half measure in the spiritual path. Women have to control the body first, and then purify thoughts through Prayer, Japa, Yoga and Meditation for empowerment. (Singh, 2014)

Emphasizing Vivekananda’s goal towards women empowerment, women’s education got a prime importance after the country got independence in 1947 and the government had taken various measures to provide education to all Indian women. As a result, literacy rate in India have risen sharply from 5.3% in 1901 to 74.04% in 2011 in which enrolment of women in education have also risen sharply 0.7% in 1901 to 65.46% in 2011.

Table 1. Literacy Rate in India

Y e a r	P e r s o n s	M a l e	F e m a l e
1 9 0 1	5 . 3	9 . 8	0 . 7
1 9 1 1	5 . 9	1 0 . 6	1 . 1
1 9 2 1	7 . 2	1 2 . 2	1 . 8
1 9 3 1	9 . 5	1 5 . 6	2 . 9
1 9 4 1	1 6 . 1	2 4 . 9	7 . 3
1 9 5 1	1 6 . 7	2 4 . 9	7 . 3
1 9 6 1	2 4 . 0	3 4 . 4	1 3 . 0
1 9 7 1	2 9 . 5	3 9 . 5	1 8 . 7
1 9 8 1	3 6 . 2	4 6 . 9	2 4 . 8
1 9 9 1	5 2 . 1	6 3 . 9	3 9 . 2
2 0 0 1	6 5 . 3	7 6 . 0	5 4 . 0
2 0 1 1	7 4 . 0	8 2 . 1	6 5 . 4

Source: Census of India 1951 to 2011

After independence, India’s national government introduced some committees and commissions for the development of women education in India, i.e. Radhakrishnan Commission or University Education Commission (1948) Smt. Durgabai Deshmukh Committee (1959), Smt. Hansa Mehta Committee (1962), M. Bhaktvatsalam Committee to look into the causes of Public Support particularly in rural area for girls’ education and to public corporation, Kothari Commission (1964-64), Resolution on the National policy on education (1968), Report of the Committee on the status of women in India (1974), Challenge of Education (1985), National policy on Education (1986), Programme of Action (1986) and (1992) etc. On the other hand, to develop the primary education and to achieve the aim of universalisation of

Elementary Education up to age level 6-14 years, some schemes or programmes like OBB, DPEP, SSA, NLM, National Programme of Nutritional Support of Primary Education (NPNSPE) or (Mid-Day Meals), Right To Education Act-2009 and Knowledge Commission etc. were introduced to achieve the national goal i.e., hundred percent literacy.

The Programme of Action (POA, 1992) translated the guidelines into an action strategy, in the section “Education for Women’s Equality” focused on empowerment of women as the critical precondition for their participation in the education process. To reach education at every corner of the household, The Mahila Samakhyas Programme (Education for Women’s Equality) as a pilot project initiated in 1989 to translate the goals of NPE and POA into a concrete programme for the education and empowerment of women in rural areas, particularly of women from socially and economically marginalized groups. (Maity, 2016) According to the Human Development Report (1993) education is a person’s first step in learning and knowledge building. So literacy indicators are essential for any measurement of human development.

The Government of India has declared 2001 as Women’s Empowerment year. The national policy on empowerment of women has set certain clear-cut goals and objectives. The policy aims at upliftment, development and empowerment in socio-economic and politico-cultural aspects, by creating the awareness among women on various issues on human rights, fundamental freedom, providing access to health care, quality education at all levels, career building, vocational guidance, employment, equal remuneration, occupational opportunities, health, safety, social security and public life etc. in relation to their empowerment. The Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), which was launched in 2001-02, is the national umbrella programme that is spearheading the Universalisation of Elementary Education (UEE) through a community-owned approach, with a specific focus on the provision of quality education. Vivekananda believed that education should spread to every corner of household in the country. To bring every student in the school system, the ICDS, SSK, MSK have been set up at every corner of the country. Every child in these schemes must be attended the school system with the active involvement of appointed social workers (Sikshabandhu) working in the most grass root level. (Maity, 2016)

The National Commission for Women was set up by an Act of Parliament in 1990 to safeguard the right and legal entitlements of women. India’s National Policy for the Empowerment of Women, 2001 perceived the need for increased space for women in decision-making, economic and social policies, enhanced opportunities and gender equality in the fields of education, health, etc. and prescribed to achieve the goal by 2010. The specific goals of the Policy stress the need to attain equal participation in decision-making in social and economic life, to enable women to identify their full potential, equal access to quality education, career-guidance, employment, health and safety and changing societal attitudes and community practices. But the goals specified by the National Policy are yet to be achieved. Because, the 2011 census report indicates the literacy among women as only 65.46 percent, it is virtually disheartening to observe that the literacy rate of women India is even much lower to national average i.e. 74.04. The Saakshar Bharat Mission was launched on 8th September, 2009. It aims to promote and strengthen adult education specially of women, by extending educational options to those adults who have lost the opportunity of formal education and now need the learning of any type, including, literacy, basic education, vocational education (skill development), physical and emotional development, practical arts, applied science, sports, and recreation.

Recommendations

Some recommendations to promote and foster the women's education for women empowerment in India

1. Providing women's group like self help groups to promote women's literacy.
2. Involving free and compulsory education for all girls up to 18 years.
3. Bringing out change in the attitude of parents and in the society.
4. Removal of gender bias in the school curriculum.
5. Establishing of more number of primary and secondary school.

Conclusion

Women's empowerment should be a prerequisite to national regeneration and an index of national achievement in the connected discourse of civilization, progress, and modernity in India. Vivekananda's vision and mission is to initiate the progress of women for the progress of entire nation. His goal is to reawaken women with self-confidence and to re-establish their dignified position in society through emancipate them from their overall subjugation. In the Indian social, cultural and economic context, women's empowerment cannot be achieved within a short span of time. As formal agency, the government of India implemented different schemes to improve the living conditions of women at different times. The women have to utilize the chances given to them. They need to be proactive in the process lifelong learning. (Maity, 2016). Emancipation well as empowerment of women is a necessity for the sustainable development of a nation. So, development practitioners should be women friendly in its various schemes. Surely, the women's movement needs to take a hard look at the gaps on the ground, if the women of tomorrow are to find the 'international women's day' as anything more than a meaningless farce.

With the change of time we need to change ourselves, we have to adopt new ideas, thoughts in every aspect of our life not only for the proper development but for survival also. In the 21st century, the history of women shows that they have come across many changing statuses. But it would be a sad commentary on the subordinate role of women in India when woman is ideally viewed as Shakti (Power), but in reality found as helpless, hapless woman without any identity except of a wife, or the mother who has very little voice in decision making and has very little power of her own basic choice. Till today in the 21st century exploitation of women are global phenomena. Among the modern Indian reformers and leaders, who stood for complete equality of men and women, the most outstanding was Swami Vivekananda. He was highly sympathetic towards the exploited position of Indian women and insisted on their regeneration, argued for gender equality, and women empowerment from all sides. (Dey, Kepchachaki & Roy, 2015). Today Swamiji's words have proved true. Following the footsteps of Sarada Devi and Sister Nivedita hundreds of women all over the world are coming forward with a combination of the 'mother's heart and the hero's will', a combination of the purity of holy mother and the dynamism of Rani of Jhansi. But these are the questions to our society why women are considered under marginalized group in the 21st century also? What was the way out to save and promote Indian women? Education may be the only answer not only for women but also for men.

At last we can say that a proper women education should be in such a way that they would able to solve their won problem and empower the women, which was the important aim of Swami Vivekananda about women education. His vision on women education for women empowerment and Today's mission of eradicating gender gap in literacy rate both indicate one goal..... progress..... progress of women and thereby the progress of entire nation – "Many Paths, one Goal".

“Arise, Awake and Stop not still the goal is reached”

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