



THE VIEWS OF SWAMI VIVEKANANDA ON WOMEN EDUCATION IN RELEVANCE TO 21ST CENTURY

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ABSTRACT

"If you educate a man, you educate an individual, but if you educate a woman you educate a family (nation)." -Dr. James Kwegyir-Aggrey

Progress of a country cannot be possible without the educational development of the women community of the society. Due to this, our first and foremost step is to strengthen the educational status of women who belonging in the marginalized group and constitute half of the total population. Swami Vivekananda who was an international figure, a great thinker and reformer of India realizes and gives stress on women education in the 19th century. He realized that women are the wealth 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. To explain his thought about women education Swamiji remarked, "There is no chance of the welfare of the world unless the condition of women is improved. It is not possible for a bird to fly on one wing." He repeatedly told that Indians downfall was largely due to her negligence of women and to solve this problem he suggested proper women education. Here in this study an attempt has been made to expand and analyze Vivekananda's views on women education, problem of women education in the present context, implementation of Swamiji's views about women education in 21st century.

Key words: *Marginalized, Negligence, Proper Women Education, downfall, Welfare*



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Introduction

“There is no chance of the welfare of the world unless the condition of women is improved. It is not possible for a bird to fly on one wing.”
- Swami Vivekananda

Swami Vivekananda was the pioneer among the modern Indian reformers and leaders, who stood for Gender Equality. Vivekananda considered women to be the incarnation of power. He rightly pointed out that unless Indian women secure a respectable place in this country, the nation can never forward. He was with the view that “The best thermometer to the progress of a nation is its treatment of women”. He was highly sympathetic towards the oppressed position of Indian women and argued gender equality. According to Vedanta Philosophy, men and women and all beings are divine in their essential nature. He was with the view that “women is as courageous as man.” But “woman has suffered for eons and that gave her infinite patience and perseverance.” Swami Vivekananda believed that the first manifestation of God is the hand that rocks the cradle. In fact, in few civilizations we find a cow giving milk, the earth bearing grains, a tree bearing fruit and the mother tending babies being revered equally as manifestation of God, like in the Indian civilization. Swamiji very boldly said in those days that in the West woman were treated as wife while in the East she was treated as the mother. Thus, he tried to draw a distinct line between materialism and spiritualism in the treatment of women. However, unfortunate it is a ‘fait accompli’ that the once revered mother in India is today wailing at the malnutrition of her babies and outrage to her modesty. Allegorically, it is true in case of the healthy Mother Cow that is slaughtered, the rich mother earth that is exploited selfishly and the mother tree that faces near extinction. It’s right time to remember the ‘immortal’ soul and mend our ways. Swamiji was a monk, who renounced material pleasures for spirituality. In early days, it is said, he saw women as an obstacle in his path. He laid stress on women education in days when women were deprived of the basic privilege. He says the Universe is one of perfect balance. He said, “If women cannot fight nor can man suffer or endure the vagaries of life”. Therefore, in this paper an attempt has been made to analyse the views of Swami Vivekananda and Women Education Relevance in the 21st Century.

Objectives:

1. To analyse Swami Vivekananda's thoughts on women education.
2. To analyse Swami Vivekananda's views on women empowerment.
3. To analyse Swami Vivekananda's views on women education in India in 21st century.
4. To find out Present Literacy rates in India.

Thoughts on Women's Education:

1. The main objective of his scheme of women's education was to make them strong, fearless, and conscious of their chastity and dignity. According to him, for women, problems can be many but none that cannot be solved by that magic word "education". He was emphatic that women must be educated, for it is the women who mould the next generation, and hence, the destiny of the country.
2. In Swamiji's educational scheme for India, the uplift of women and the masses received the highest priority. To make a beginning in women's education, his argument centered on chastity because it is the heritage of Hindu women. He said, daughters should be supported and educated with as much care and attention as the sons.
3. Swamiji emphasized women studying religion, science, art, housekeeping, cooking, sewing, hygiene, etc. along with japa, worship and meditation. He said, "Ideal characters must always be presented before the girls to imbue them with a devotion to principles of selflessness."
4. Swami Vivekananda was a monk who at one time saw women as an obstacle. However on realising the highest truth he saw no distinction between sex and saw in women the presence of the Divine Mother. Swami Vivekananda worked effortlessly to try and uplift the plight of women, in particular Indian Women.
5. "Soul has no sex, it is neither male nor female. It is only in the body that sex exists, and the man who desires to reach the spirit cannot at the same time hold sex distinctions.
6. We should not think that we are men and women, but only that we are human beings, born to cherish and to help one another. No sooner are a young man and a young woman left alone than he pays compliments to her, and perhaps before he takes a wife, he has courted two hundred women.

7. Men and women in every country, have different ways of understanding and judging things. Men have one angle of vision, women another; men argue from one standpoint, women from another. Men extenuate women and lay the blame on men; while women exonerate men and heap the entire heap on women.

Swami Vivekananda's Women Empowerment

Swami Vivekananda wanted to start such a way of education for Indian women that would easily understandable as well as acceptable to all over the country. He observed that "Hindu women easily understand what chastity means, because it is their heritage. Now, first of all, intensify that ideal within them above everything else, so that they may develop a strong character by the force of which, in every stage of life, they will not be in the least afraid even to give up their lives rather than flinch an inch from their chastity." Swamiji declared that the western ideal of womanhood is wife, while the eastern ideal is mother. "The very peculiarity of Hindu women which they have developed and which is the ideal of their life, is that of the mother...." It is very difficult to understand why in this country so much difference is made between men and women, where Vedanta declared that one and the same self was present in all beings. Women must be put in a position so that they could solve their problems in their own way. Women in statesmanship, managing territories, governing countries, even making war, have proved themselves equal to men, if not superior. Whenever they have had the opportunity, they have proved that they have as much ability as men, with this advantage- that they seldom degenerate. They keep to the moral standard, which is innate in their nature. And thus as governors and rulers of their state, they prove –at least in India for superior to men.

Swami Vivekananda promoted self-respect of women in the society:

How Swami Vivekananda supported women in the society-

1. Swami Vivekananda strongly believed that the women should be educated and that any decision regarding the welfare of widows and women should be in the hands of the women themselves. "Vivekananda was not interested in addressing issues like widow's remarriage or the age when the girls can be married off. Nor did he like men interfering their affairs. He

categorically asserted that it is wrong, a thousand times wrong, if any man dare say, 'I will work for the salvation of this woman or child'."

2. It was not that Vivekananda was not concerned with women's welfare and wanted to subvert any initiative for reformation. He wanted women to have full freedom to understand their own ideals, their problems and to propose solutions for their own betterment. He believed that women could tap and use their capabilities, if they were properly educated. He believed in the self-respect and self-dignity of women and wanted no man to trample upon it, be it in the guise of protection or in the guise of reformation, he said.
3. In terms of the caste system, although he was against untouchability, Vivekananda pointed that almost all civilizations of the world were first governed and controlled by the priestly classes. Questioning the supremacy and authority of the priests, warrior classes began to assert their rights and controls. Next the merchant classes, controlling the entire affairs of the state through the strength of wealth gathered through trade and commerce.
4. He believed that a time would come when the labour class and the masses would rise and gain supremacy by the power of their sweat and labour.

Women Education in India:

"Educate a man and you educate one person. Educate a woman and you educate the whole family." J.L.Nehru

Swamiji emphasized women studying religion, science, art, housekeeping, cooking, sewing, hygiene, etc. along with, japa, worship and meditation. He said, "Ideal characters must always be presented before the girls to imbue them with a devotion to principles of selflessness." It is well known that Vivekananda received a three minute standing ovation from thousands assembled at the World Parliament of Religions at Chicago in 1893, when he began his address with the words "Sisters and Brothers of America". However, few know about his life and teachings. Fewer still know of his views on women in India. It was not that Vivekananda was not concerned with

women's welfare and wanted to subvert any initiative for reformation. He wanted women to have full freedom to understand their own ideals, their problems and to propose solutions for their own betterment. He believed that women could tap and use their capabilities, if they were properly educated. He believed in the self-respect and self-dignity of women and wanted no man to trample upon it, be it in the guise of protection or in the guise of reformation, he said. It is very difficult to understand why in this country so much difference is made between men and women, where Vedanta declared that one and the same Self was present in all beings. Women must be put in a position so that they could solve their problems in their own way. The main objective of his scheme of women's education was to make them strong, fearless, and conscious of their chastity and dignity. According to him, for women, problems can be many but none that cannot be solved by that magic word 'education'. He was emphatic that women must be educated, for it is the women who mould the next generation, and hence, the destiny of the country. Therefore, in Swamiji's educational scheme for India, the uplift of women and the masses received the highest priority. To make a beginning in women's education, his argument centred on chastity because it is the heritage of Hindu women. He said, daughters should be supported and educated with as much care and attention as the sons. He prescribed an education that would create "great fearless women – women worthy to continue the traditions of Sangamitra, Lila, Ahalya Bai, and Mira Bai. For him development of true ideal of womanhood was the primary goal of education.

Present Literacy rates in Indian Scenario

Women education in India in independent India acquired special significance and has been supported by the government from time to time through its policies and programmes. Therefore in recent years the Education system has expanded rapidly. But still a large number of women are in dark and the gender gap in literacy rate remains starting by its presence. The following facts and figures throw light on the critically of the problem which is a harsh reality and **demonstrate that we have an extraordinary task ahead.**

Table: 1. Literacy rates in India (1951-2011)

Year	Persons	Male	Female	Male Female Gap in Literacy Rate
1951	18.33	27.16	08.86	18.30
1961	28.30	40.40	15.35	25.05
1971	34.45	45.96	21.97	23.98
1981	43.57	56.38	29.76	26.62
1991	52.21	64.13	39.29	24.84
2001	64.84	75.26	53.67	21.59
2011	74.04	82.14	65.46	16.68

[Source: Census of India, 2011]

According to the census of 2011, the Literacy Rate in India is around 74%. Table 1 shows the % of Literacy Rates among male and females in India. The gap which was 18.30 % in 1951 increased to 25.05% in 1961 and 26.62% in 1981. After 1991, there was a slow decrease in the gap as the literacy rate among women started increasing gradually due to interventions taken by the government. The gap of 21.59% points recorded between male and female literacy rates in 2001 census has reduced to 16.68% points by 2011-2012. The 2011 census report indicates that literacy among women as only 65.46% which is much lower to national average i.e. 74.04%. Gender inequality in education is proved by the fact that the literacy rate for the women is only 65.46% against 82.14% of men as per 2011 census. Though there is tremendous increase in the female literacy rate after independence, the gap between male and female literacy rate is declining very slowly.

Table: 2. Gender Wise Literacy Rate in Rural and Urban area in 2001 and 2011

India	Rural			Urban			Total		
	Person	Male	Female	Person	Male	Female	Person	Male	Female
2001	58.74	70.7	46.13	79.92	86.77	72.86	64.84	75.26	53.67
2011	67.77	77.1	57.93	84.11	88.76	79.11	74.04	82.14	65.46

[Source: Census of India, 2011]

Table 2 compares the gender wise literacy rate in rural and urban area in 2001 and 2011. The literacy rate went up from 64.84% in 2001 to 74.04% in 2011 showing an increase of 9.21%. Female literacy in 2001 stood at 53.67%, it has gone up to 65.46% in 2011. The male literacy in comparison rose from 75.26% to 82.14%. The data shows that the improvement in female literacy is more than males in both rural and urban, during the decade 2001-2011 which represent women's are growing well in the last 10 years. The gender gap in literacy has come down from 24.57 in 2001 to 19.22 in 2011 in rural areas and from 13.41 in 2001 to 9.65 in 2011 in urban areas. The gap between the literacy rate in urban and rural areas is also declined from 21.18% in 2001 to 16.34 % in 2011.

On Womanhood

Swami Vivekananda warned it is completely unfair to discriminate between sexes, as there is not any sex distinction in atman (soul), the soul has neither sex, nor caste nor imperfection. He suggested not thinking that there are men and women, but only that there are human beings. Swami Vivekananda felt, the best thermometer to the progress of a nation is its treatment of its women and it is impossible to get back India's lost pride and honor unless they try to better the condition of women. Vivekananda considered men and women as two wings of a bird, and it is not possible for a bird to fly on only one wing. So, according to him, there is no chance for welfare of the world unless the condition of woman is improved.

Women are not playthings

Swami Vivekananda noticed almost everywhere women are treated as playthings. In modern countries like America, women have more independence, still, Vivekananda had noticed, men bow low, offer a woman a chair and in another breath they offer compliments like "Oh, how beautiful your eyes.." etc. Vivekananda felt, a man does not have any right to do this or venture so far, and any woman should not permit this as well. According to Swami Vivekananda such things develop the less noble side of humanity. They do not tend to noble ideals.

Indian women

According to Vivekananda, the ideal of womanhood in India is motherhood – that marvelous, unselfish, all-suffering, ever-forgiving mother. Vivekananda felt, in India, there are two great evils – trampling on the women, and grinding through the poor through caste restrictions. There is no chance for the welfare of the world unless the condition of woman is improved. It is not possible for a bird to fly on only one wing. There is no hope for that family or country where there is no estimation of women, where they live in sadness. For this reason, they have to be raised first. We should not think that we are men and women, but only that we are human beings, born to cherish and to help one another. No sooner are a young man and a young woman left alone than he pays compliments to her, and perhaps before he takes a wife, he has courted two hundred women. Woman has suffered for eons, and that has given her infinite patience and infinite perseverance. Woman is as courageous as man.

Conclusion:

In Conclusion, Swami Vivekananda was the most eminent great educator who contributed his life for the welfare of the women as well as masses. In India, the mother is the center of the family and our highest ideal. She is to us the representative of God, as God is the mother of the universe. A female sage first found the unity of God, and laid down this doctrine in one of the first hymns of the Vedas. Our God is both personal and absolute; the absolute is male, the personal is female. Thus, it comes that we now say: 'The first manifestation of God is the hand that rocks the cradle.' The education policy adopted by the Government of India for equality of

opportunities for the women education and empowerment has been saturated by Vivekananda's urge for women education. In this way he was so modern even in one hundred years ago. In recent times, a trend developed in India where the teachings of the Swamiji, were sought to be misinterpreted in a way unbecoming of our culture, whereas the West started seeing in him a sage that defined womanhood as Divinity in human form.

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