



Swami Vivekananda's Concept of Education

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Swami Vivekananda, the revered reformer - saint and humanist, and the epitome of all that is divine and noble in man, was intensely alive to the needs of the day. He strove incessantly and unceasingly to instil into the minds of his countrymen such ideas as would enable them to work devotedly for the moral and spiritual devotion of India's teeming millions. What depressed and pained him acutely was the heart-wrenching sight of the people around him with their hallowed tradition and culture wallowing in squalor and poverty, in ignovance and moral bankruptcy, in oppression and deprivation for centuries and have accepted it as their inescapable destiny. He realised that no true progress of the nation could be achieved as long as the people are not educated enough to understand that are being deprived and exploited. His heart bled for the countless down-trodden brethren of his - the tillers of land, the weavers, the builders of houses etal, people who are the real body of the society, the builders of the nation - who are being unabashedly made to suffer under an inhuman social set-up, mindless of the needs and rights of the common populace.

And, what did Swamiji understand by education ? He put it in this way : "The education which does not help the common mass of people to equip themselves for the struggle of life, which does not bring out strength of character, a spirit of philanthropy and the courage of a lion - is it worth the name ?" His concept of education was strikingly practical and logical. He clarified this concept thus : "Education is not the amount of information that is put into your brain and runs riot there, undigested all pour life. We must have life-building, man-making, character-making assimilation of ideas. If you have assimilated five ideas and made them your life and character, you have more education than any man who has got by heart a whole library."

Swamiji was totally opposed to the idea of acquiring only book - knowledge to the exclusion of cultivating those qualities and virtues which separate the homo sapien from other creatures. To quote his familiar and oft-repeated definition - "Education is the manifestation of perfection already in man." He elaborated this further by analysing it : "What is education ? Is it book learning ? No. Is it diverse knowledge ? Not even that. The training by which the current and expression of will are brought under control and become fruitful is called education." According to him, no knowledge comes from outside ; it is all inside. What a man learns is really what he discovers by taking the cover off his own soul which is a mine of



infinite knowledge. Education as such means development - development or unfolding of the power and attributes of the child that are already in him and that prepare an individual to be the useful and creative member of the society.

It all boils down to what has already been reiterated - that knowledge is inherent in man. And the duty of an educator is to help Children in unfolding their talent faculties - to enable them to realise their own potentialities divinely bestowed upon them and then to put them to effective use for the welfare of the bigger community of men. The greatest bane of the modern Indian academic sphere is the absence of value - based education system and it is this that stands in the way of emancipation of the masses, especially the people of the lower and under - privileged classes. Swamiji was acutely aware of this and so he said : " The only service to be done for our lower classes is to give them education, to develop their lost individuality Give them ideas - that is the only help they require, and then the rest must follow as the effect. Ours is to put the chemicals together, the crystallization comes in the law of nature." Swamiji knew it well that a society can never move ahead as long as the lower classes who constitute the bulk of it are not ~~given~~ proper education. And to achieve that end, our altitude and approach ~~must be~~ changed. Swamiji realised the problem underlying this and so he said : "If the mountain does not come to Muhammad, Muhammad must go to the mountain. If the poor boy cannot come to education, education must go to him." And what kind of education is to be imparted to him ? Swamiji is emphatic in his observation: "We want that education by which character is formed, strength of mind is increased, intellect is expanded and by which one can stand on one's feet."

It thus becomes palpable that to Swamiji education meant something that is related to life and has to be put to use for elevating the hapless, the down-trodden and the deprived sections of the society to a level where they could realise their own worth and work for their own development that would eventually lead to the progress of the society. Education as such has a much higher and nobler mission than is generally taken to be - Regrettably, the state of affairs in the educational front in India to-day is not only deplorable but also extremely disturbing. No endeavour is undertaken anywhere to impart moral education that would help in building up a sound character for the taught. There are other factors too and to a great extent the system of teaching and the quality and character of the educator are squarely to be blamed. Hardly do we find a teacher to-day who is equipped enough, morally, intellectually and academically, to be branded as a teacher in the actual and desirable sense of the term. Swamiji said in this context : "My idea of education is personal contact with the teacher - 'gurugriha-vasa'. Without the personal life of a teacher, there could be no education. Take your universities.



What have they done during the fifty years (this was told at Madras in 1897) of their existence ? They have not produced one original man. They are merely an examining body. The idea of the sacrifice for the common weal is not yet developed in this nation." If this was the scenario in 1897, we can easily surmise what could be the spectacle to-day when the country has reached its nadir of dishonesty, falsehood, depravity and degeneration.

It is indeed a pity that the quality and character of a teacher are getting more and more degraded with every passing day. There can be no greater crime than using education as a means of self gratification and fulfilling one's own personal ends. If education implies 'manifestation of perfection already in man,' as Swamiji conceived, then it has to be admitted with painful regret that modern system of education in our country has never been oriented to that end. Swamiji spoke of man-making and nation-building education and for that "we want that education by which character is formed." How many of us - the so-called educated and cultured people - can openly and boldly proclaim that we possess the required ethical and moral qualities to become teachers, that to us end is not more important than means, that we have honesty of purpose and we really want to expend all our mite for well-being of the society and its people ?

“তোমরা ঈশ্বরের সন্তান, অমৃতের অধিকারী
পবিত্র ও পূর্ণ মর্ত্যভূমিকার
দেবতা তোমরা ।”

— স্বামী বিবেকানন্দ