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Swami Vivekananda's Concept of Education: A Vedantic Perspective

Dr. Akhilesh Mani Tripathi*

***Assistant Professor (Political Science) Govt. Autonomous P.G College, Satna (M.P.) INDIA**

Abstract: Swami Vivekananda, who was the highest crest of the Indian Renaissance of 19 th century, was a great nationalist thinker apart from a universally recognized Vedantist philosopher. Over a century back, Swami Vivekananda warned that the English model of education was not only a defective system from personal perspective; it was also a vicious system detrimental to the growth of India as a nation. He provided his original concept of education which is Vedantic in its spirit and nationalist in its mission. This paper is a humble attempt to expose swami Vivekananda concept of education.
Keywords: Nation building, democratization, massification, manifestation of will.

Introduction - Swami Vivekananda had a clear vision regarding the resurgence of India as a great nationand he offered a Vedantic concept of education as an inevitable means for the nation- building. Independent India has periodically experimented with education as to find out a suitable system of education fulfilling the national necessity. However, whatever education system stakeholders adopted has essentially been based on European Model inheriting its legacy from colonial system of education. Swami Vivekananda was first among the modern Indian political thinkers to acknowledge the significance of the educational system in national perspective. He assigned one of the fundamental causes of India's downfall to the persistent educational system and argued for its overhauling for the recovery of national strength. He recognized the system of education in terms of national power and attempted to ensure national progress and unity through it what Plato did in Athens[1].

India's Fault in matter of Education: To Swami Vivekananda, democratization of the educational system is the foremost condition of growth in national strength, and any political system, which disallows it, is bound to destroy its own nation. Unless the masses have access to the benefits of education as their right, a nation can never rise up to its fullest scope. According to Vivekananda, it was deprivation of masses from education that led India to decline as a nation, "The chief cause of India's ruin has been the monopolizing of the whole education and intelligence of the land, by dint of pride and royal authority, among a handful of man[2]. It was the massification of education that allowed the Western countries to grow as a powerful nation – "The whole difference between the West and the East is in this: they are nations, we are not, i.e., civilization, education here is general, it penetrates into the masses"[3].

Thus, Vivekananda concludes that democratization and massification of education is the key factor to lead a country to grow into a nation. Since monopolization of education prevented Indian from growing into a nation, it became the victim of foreign rule – "why was it so easy for the English to conquer India? It was because they are a nation, we are not"[4].

Expansion of education to the masses expands the life-force of a nation, upheld Vivekananda. Life strength of a nation, according to Vivekananda, depends on how much wider area of recruitment of competent human resources in different fields it provides with, and for this an educational system is required to be democratized enough to allow the masses getting benefitted from it to the maximum. Vivekananda argues that it is only because of the monopolization of education in India that when one of our great men dies, we must sit for centuries to have another, while the Western nations can produce them as fast as they die owing to their system of education open to the masses[5]. India as a nation does not stand at par with the Western ones "because they have such a bigger field of recruiting their great ones, we have so small"[6], "because the number of educated men and women in those nations is so great"[7]. "This is the great defect in our nation and must be removed"[8]. Thus, Swami Vivekananda, contrary to the nation that education is an individual affair, undertook it as national one. If Plato devised his idea of education to discover his ideal state, Swami Vivekananda expounded his idea of education with single intention to get India grow

into a strong nation in future[9]. To him, education was the only panacea for India's national reconstruction and resurgence, because it is, in addition to be a medium of personal salvation, a patent method of national salvation too.

Critique of Western System of Education: Vivekananda has criticized the English system of education introduced in India on various grounds. He admits 'some good points' of this system, "but it has a tremendous disadvantage so great that the good things are all weighed down[10].

"In the first place, it is not a man-making education, it is merely and entirely a negative education"[11]. The negativity of this British educational system is manifest in various ways. Owing to this educational system, men are becoming destitute of `Sraddha' ad faith. "The child is taken to school and he learns is that "his father is fool", ad that "all the sacred books are lies"[12]. "They assert that the Gita is only an interpolation, and that the Vedas are but rustic songs"[13]. "What is it they (the students) learn but that what religion and customs, we have are all bad, and what the Westerners have are all good"[14]. This negativity has tremendously affected the boys of India. By the time a student is sixteen, "He is a mass of negation, lifeless and boneless"[15]. Vivekananda shows the national disadvantage of this negative education – "And the result is that fifty years of such education has not produced"[16]. He reminds that, "Every man of originality that has been produced has been educated elsewhere, and not in this country, or they have gone to the old universities once more to cleanse themselves of superstitious[17].

Vivekananda points it out that the Western pattern of education launched in India was "nothing but a perfect machine for turning out clerks"[18].

All these negativity uploaded in the English pattern of education in India was directed with single purpose as to make the Indians quite faithless in their history, to cut them off their root in order to deprive them from their faith in self, because "a nation that has no history of its own has nothing in this world"[19]. Vivekananda was so much conscious of this national danger resulting from the negative character of British education system that he endeavored to find an educational system in India completely `independent of foreign control'[20].

What is Education: According to Swami Vivekananda,"education is the manifestation of the perfection already in man"[21]. The philosophy of Vedanta upholds that man is potentially divine, that man is potentially perfect. But the greatest challenge before man is how to get this potential perfection manifested into actual performance. According to Vivekananda, the process that makes it possible is called 'education'. This process that enable potential perfection to be transformed into actual perfection is called the 'development of faculty'. Therefore, this 'development of faculty', i.e. actualization of potential perfection, denotes the real education, according to Vivekananda. That is why he upholds that the true education "may be described as a development of faculty, not an accumulation of words, or as a training of individuals to will rightly and efficiently"[22].

The question arises if the development of faculty is the sign of education how does it process? Vivekananda replies that it is through the training of individuals to will rightly and efficiently – "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 becomes fruitful is called education"[23].

Why Education is essential: Human soul always strives to manifest its perfection[24]. This manifestation of perfection, what is called the development of faculty, takes place through the expression of 'will'. This manifestation of will is the wish of human soul to transgress the law of nature that opposes the manifestation of inherent perfection. What is intelligence is nothing but the reflection of 'will', according to Vivekananda. "There is no manifestation of will in the machine, the machine never wishes to transgress law; the worm wants to oppose law, rises against law whether it succeeds or not, therefore, it is intelligent"[25]. According to Vivekananda, man grows higher "in proportion as this will is more successfully manifested"[26]. Since "The will of God is perfectly fruitful, therefore, He is the highest"[27]. Therefore, it is for the successful manifestation of 'will' that education is required for human beings, propoundSwami Vivekananda. In the light of this proposition, Vivekananda arrived at two conclusions with regard to his idea of education –

(i) Education is required for the manifestation of 'free will' of individual. Real education is only that, which enables man with the faculty of free will. True education is that which frees the human will, not that; which is slowly making a man machine'. What is required is man – making education – education that culminates in the freedom of will. This freedom of will is so much an essential part of education, according to Vivekananda, that he goes to the extent of expressing. It is more blessed, in my opinion, even to go wrong impelled by one's free will and intelligence than to be good as an automation"[28].

(ii) Manifestation of will in itself is not sufficient. What more one is required is its manifestation in 'right' and 'efficient' way, i.e. a "training of individuals to will rightly and efficiently"[29]. In words of Vivekananda, "The training by which the current and expression of will are brought under control and become fruitful is called education"[30].

Both these aspects together form the complete sense of education, that is, the education what Vivekananda terms as "Man-making education"[31]. If there is an education system that serves or fulfils both of these purposes only that education can produce the individuals fit for themselves as well as for their nation. Only this kind of education can `help the common mass of people equip themselves for

the struggle for life' and enable them `to stand on one's own legs"[32], be it in their personal life or in their national life: And only this kind of education can produce the individuals that form a nation.

Dimensions of Education: Vivekananda states, "Education is not the amount of information that is part into your brain and runs riot there, undigested, all your life"[33]. "If education is identical with information, the libraries are the greatest sages in the world, and encyclopedias are the risis" [34].

As Vivekananda has described education as the manifestation of free will trained enough to be ensued rightly and efficiently, it involves the "assimilation" of those ideas which are `life-building' man-making and character making"[35]. According to Vivekananda, this man making education – education that enables free manifestation of will and trains the current and expression of will as to be brought under control in order to get it manifest rightly and efficiently – comprises four dimensions –

(1) Character forming
(2) Strengthening of mind
(3) Expanding of intellect
(4) Bringing self- reliance

Conclusion: Swami Vivekananda propounded that there is profound connection between educational system and nation building and only a democratic system of education produce a great nation. Swami Vivekananda rightly observed that education is not an individual affair but it is a national endeavor. He was also right in his proposition that education is not a process of serving information but it is a process of assimilation of the ideas into a personality. For Swami Vivekananda education is essentially a process of life building, man making and character making. This is the point which contemporary education system of India has to learn from Swami Vivekananda in order to construct India into a cultured, civilized and powerful nation.

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