

Education as Envisioned by Swami Vivekananda

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The personality of any person can be judged on the basis of how a person behaves, thinks and feels, how he conducts/puts himself in a given set of circumstances. In a nutshell, it can be said that personality includes the whole nature or character of a person. In order to know the personality in its real sense one must consider the hereditary traits and environmental aspects of a person especially when a person; becomes the role model for the whole humanity. Therefore before taking into account or considering the views given by swami ji on education it is pertinent to have a serious look on his heredity as well as the environment he was brought into get an idea about his personality. Narendranath Dutta (Swami Vivekananda) was born to Sri Vishwanath Dutta and Bhuvaneshwari Devi in Kolkata (Calcutta) on 12th January 1863 in a rich, respectable family which was renowned for charity, learning and strong spirit of independence. Swami ji's grand father was a great scholar of Persian and Sanskrit. Similarly Vishvanath Dutta also was a known scholar of English and Persian along with being a serious scholar of Hindu scriptures. He was a kind hearted person . It is said that Bhuvaneshwari Devi had worshipped Lord Shiva and by god's grace and blessings Narenendra was born. Since his childhood he had a sharp and logical mind with high intellect and curiosity. He also had a great attraction for spiritual matters. It is said that the impact of stories of Mahabharata and Ramayana narrated by his mother left an indelible impression on his mind.

Personality traits such as courage, curiosity, empathy for the fellow being and attraction towards wandering monks appeared spontaneously in him. These traits helped him a lot in developing a personality with strong physique, effective voice and a brilliant intellect. By transmitting his own power as blessings showered on Narendra his Guru Swami Ramkrishna Paramhans has bestowed completeness into his personality. It would be pertinent to add an event here that when Vivekananda requested his Guru for nirvikalp samadhi the words uttered by Swami Ram Krishna Paramhans were indirectly the task deputed to Vivekanandas; the wider reason for his appearance on this planet. The words uttered were "Shame on you! I thought you would grow like a huge Banyan, sheltering thousands from scorching misery of the world. But now I see you seek your own liberation." Before his mahanirvan his guru while transmitting his own

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power told him “ By the force of the power transmitted by me, great things will be done by you; only after that will you go to whence you come”. Thus by such a refined heredity, spiritually vibrant environment and above all the transmission of wisdom through enlightenment bestowed by Paramhansa all have contributed in making such a great personality known as Vivekananda. He is known for possessing immense mental, physical and spiritual strength, empathy for the human being, deep love and gratitude for mother India and a strong commitment for the upliftment of fellow citizens. He knew that every human being has immense potential in him. The only role of education is to help the learner to find out the treasure within. That is why he defined education as “manifestation of the perfection already in man.” If we go through the vision of swami ji on various aspects of education, we can feel the eagerness with which swami ji wanted to overhaul the whole system of education in a wider sense by putting the fragrance of Indianness in it. He said that “education that does not help the common mass of people to equip themselves for the struggle for life, which does not bring out strength of character, a spirit of philanthropy and the courage of lion, is it worth the name? ... Education is not the amount of information that is put into the brain and runs riot there, undigested all your life. We must have life- building, man-making, character making assimilation of ideas. The end of all education, all training should be man making.”

When we think about the present day's education system we can easily conclude that how the existing education system has failed in making a good human being. Instead, we are putting all our efforts to make a robot in the form of human being who has expertise in information processing but is totally a failure in the processing of humane feelings. Therefore the role of education as envisioned by swami ji as man making is yet to be achieved.

We know that the main components of education are- teacher , learner and teaching – learning process comprising teaching methods and congenial learning environment. Swami ji's expectations from teachers can be viewed in the following lines:

Teacher :

“The teacher who deals too much in words and allows the mind to be carried away by the force of words losses the spirit. It is the knowledge of the spirit of the scriptures alone that constitute the true teacher. The second condition necessary for the teacher is sinlessness (he must be perfectly pure and then only comes the value of his words.)The teacher must not teach with any ulterior selfish motive for money, name or fame. His work must be simply out of love , out of pure love for

mankind at large.

The only true teacher is he who can convert himself, as it were, into a thousand persons at a moment's notice, the true teacher is he who can immediately come down to the level of the student, and transfer his soul to the student's soul and see through and understands through his mind. Such a teacher can really teach and none else... We hear most splendid orations, most wonderfully reasoned out discourses, and we go home and forget them all. At other times we hear a few words in the simplest language, and they enter into our lives, become part and parcel of ourselves and produce lasting results. The word of a man who can put his personality into them, take effect, but he must have tremendous personality. All teaching implies giving and taking. The teacher gives and the taught receives but the one must have something to give and the other must be open to receive. The teacher must throw his whole force into the tendency of the taught. Without real sympathy we can never teach well. Let us perfect the means; the end will take care of itself."

Though the agencies like NCTE and NCERT are trying their level best to prepare such teachers by reforming the curriculum as well as transactional strategies but we know that still we are not preparing the teachers as envisioned by swami ji.

Learner :

Swami ji was very much concerned of the sanctity and purity of heart of teachers and learners as he was of the view that wisdom can only be achieved through purity, perseverance, faith in oneself and a real thirst of knowledge. He said that the conditions necessary for the learner who wants to achieve knowledge are "Purity (in thought, speech and act), a real thirst of knowledge and Perseverance. Without faith, submission and veneration in our hearts towards the teacher, there cannot be any growth in us. The conditions a disciple must fulfill are that student who wants to know the truth must give up all desires for gain. He must be able to control the internal and external senses (control of mind) and conceive an extreme desire to be free (hunger for the stomach and sex)."

In nut shell swami ji had emphasized the role of purity, quest of knowledge, perseverance, humility and great respect for the teacher as the qualities that are a must for a learner. Unfortunately these qualities have become rare today as far as the learners are concerned.

Methods of Teaching :

Swami ji has emphasized the role of methods of teaching in knowledge generation by saying that "To me the very essence of education is concentration

of mind, not the mere collection of facts . If I would develop the power of concentration and detachment , and then with a perfect instrument, collect facts as well... The teaching must be modified to the needs of the taught. Past lives have moulded our tendencies, and so give to the pupil according to his tendencies. Take everyone where he stands and push him forward. There is only one method by which to attain knowledge , that which is called concentration.

Swami ji has emphasized on two important essence of education . These are – power of concentration and detachment which according to him are essential tools for learning.

We know that there are some more things that have to be cherished in the learner if he has to become a good citizen along with being a good human being. In order to reach this goal there are many aspects which are the part and parcel of the journey of becoming a good human being. These are – character building, peaceful living, developing love and strong bonding with mother India, respecting women , having empathy with fellow citizens , being affectionate with younger ones and caring for senior citizens and above all considering all the living being as the member of the family of mother earth.

Character Building :

Swami ji was of the view that character is the real wealth of a human being. He said “The character of any man is but the aggregate of his tendencies, the sum total of the bent of his mind. As pleasure and pain pass before his soul, they leave upon it different pictures, and the result of those combined impressions is what is called a man's character... As compared to all other wealth , character is the only wealth which distinguishes a society and its members in terms of its fundamental strength to ensure sustainability.”

Peace :

He insisted that peace is highly essential for the prosperity of any nation. According to him “peace means not only the absence of war instead it means the minimization of any kind of conflict and the presence of harmony, love, empathy, feeling of togetherness etc. which are the prerequisite for a planet where human beings live.” Therefore he has emphasized the significance of peace as well as peace education in these words, “Peace is the behavior that encourages harmony in the way people talk, listen and interact with each other and discourages actions to hurt, harm or destroy each other... Peace should mean not only absence of war, but also violence in all forms, such as conflicts, threat to life, social degradation, discrimination, oppression, exploitation, poverty, injustice and so on.”

He was of the opinion that peace and harmony comes easily under three basic points. These are

- Inner peace – self contentedness,
- Social peace – respect and love for diversity, harmony in human relationship.
- Peace with nature – Harmony with natural environment and mother earth.

Inner peace helps in cultivating inner strength and fulfillment in the individual. With this strength an individual can render his duties without having any expectation of reward for the same whereas social peace is highly related with the sanctity in relationship. It is an irony that though we pretend that we are superior to animals but sometimes when we behave with our fellow human beings our behavior becomes so shameful that this superiority becomes a big inferiority. Therefore it is essential to sustain the superiority of being human by killing the thoughts or acts which put a question mark on us as a human being. Third important point is harmony with natural environment and mother earth. Swami ji was very much influenced with the teaching of Vedas and upanishads. In Vedas it is mentioned that if the mother nature will be in peace she will bestow her blessings to her children. Thus nobody will remain deprived of food, water or anything which can be received from the nature. That is why worshiping rivers, trees, animals as a blessing of god still persists in our rituals as well as in our daily life. The saying that whole earth is a big family is the proof of inculcation of values related to these three basic points. Swami ji insisted that peace education must be given in the educational institutions by saying that “If education is the only defense against human catastrophe, peace education is the soul of education that can create the shield for human survival on the planet earth. It is only through peace education that peace can be installed in human minds as an antidote to war in the minds of man.”

Patriotism :

Another important role that education must play according to swami ji is that it should imbibe patriotism in youth and they should develop a strong belongingness to their motherland. According to him “Education must provide three things for the development of patriotism and freedom: They are - Love for the mother country, a strong will to desist evil and steadfastness in achieving the desired goal.”

Swamiji and Women :

Swami ji had a great regard for women- especially for the Indian women. He was of the opinion that though Indian women are not very educated and fashionable

as the women in the west are but they are better than the western women in providing better upbringing to their children and better congenial environment to their family members. He was very much influenced with the character of Sita as he has said that "women of our country have the role model like Sita." He emphasized that women should be given full respect as it brings the prosperity in the family as well as in the country. According to him "All nations have attained greatness by paying proper respect to women. That countries and nations which do not respect women have never become great, nor will ever be in future. The principal reason why our race has so degenerated is that we had no respect for this living image of Shakti. Manu says, 'Where women are respected, there the Gods delight, and where they are not, there all work and effort come to naught.' There is no hope of rise for that family or country where they live in sadness. ... 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."

If we go through the lines mentioned above we can easily understand the kind of respect Swami ji had for Indian women.

Education for masses :

When we think about the significance of education for the masses it seems that swami ji was very much concerned about the well being of those people who due to one or other reason could not get facilities they deserve as being the human being. While emphasizing the importance of education he said that "A nation is advanced in proportion as education and intelligence spread among the masses. The chief cause of India's ruin has been the monopolizing of land among a handful of men. If we are to rise again, we shall have to do it by spreading education among the masses. The only service needed is to be able to develop their individuality. They are to be given ideas. Their eyes are to be opened to what is going on in the world around them, and then they will work out their own salvation. Every man and every woman must work out their own salvation. Give them ideas – that is the only help they require and then the rest must follow as effect. ... I love the poor who feels for the two hundred millions of men and women sunken forever in poverty and ignorance? Him I call a Mahataman who feels for the poor, Who feels for them? They cannot find light or travel from door to door bringing education to them? Let these people be your God-think of them, work for them, pray for them incessantly-the Lord will show you the way."

After so many years of independence, the monopoly of few rich people on thousands of poor and down trodden still persists in the society. Swami ji's eagerness regarding their upliftment places him on the top as far as the love for poor fellow citizens are concerned.

Swami ji 's role as a reformer as well as torch bearer for the society can easily be felt in the following lines in which he has given the formula as the requisites for great achievements. According to him for great achievements three things are necessary. These are -

- Feeling :One should feel from the heart.
- The Solution: If the whole world stands against you having a sword in hand, would you still dare to do what you think is right?
- Steadfastness: He indeed is the steady man who does not move one inch from the way of truth.

These three things indicate the firmness, perseverance, strong will power, involvement and righteousness as the pre requisites for success mentioned by Swami ji.

- Swami ji has given the same importance to the means used to achieve the goal and the goal itself. He was of the view that means chosen to achieve the goal must be pure and right. According to him “Ends and means are integrally related. Both should be given equal weightage... Our great defect in life is that we are so much drawn to the ideal; the goal is so much more enchanting, so much alluring, so much bigger in our mental horizon that we lose sight of the details altogether. We only get what we deserve. It is a lie. When we say, the world is bad and we are good. It can never be so. It is a terrible lie we tell ourselves. This is the first lesson to learn : be determined not to curse anything outside, not to lay the blame upon anyone outside, but be yourself. You will always find that is always true, Get hold of yourself.”

These beautiful lines are self sufficient to know how the life should be dealt with. What makes man a real human being. How the trait of introversion helps in the introspection and inturn, helps in the self development of an individual in becoming the role model for the society.

Swami ji had great expectation from the youths of his beloved mother India. He addressed the youths of the country on many occasions. “Be strong, my friends; that is my advice to you .You will be nearer to heaven through football than through the study of the Gita. These are bold words; but I have to say them, for I love you. I know where the shoe pinches. I have gained a little experience. You will understand the Gita better with your biceps, your muscles, a little stronger. This one question I put to every manAre you strong? Do you feel strength ? – for I know it is truth alone that gives strength... strength is the medicine for the world's disease. ”

His love for the upliftment of common people as well as the desire for the

prosperity of fellow citizens can be felt in the following lines where he said “Whatever you think, that you will be. If you think yourselves weak, weak you will be; if you think yourselves strong, strong you will be ... Death is better than a vegetating ignorant life ; it is better to die on the battle –field than to live life a defeat.”

Thus, we can conclude that Swami Vivekananda was an intuitive scientist, yet great rationalist. Owing to the faculty of natural gift of the gap in abundance, he was wonderfully able to synthesize the excellence of the west with that of east. There is discernible a ring of sincerity in his every word and thought. He talked on almost all the subjects and issues which concerns mankind today and in times to come. His comprehensive vision in this regard included diverse matters ranging from quality and excellence to national integration and international understanding, educational opportunity, education of the masses, environmental education, women empowerment, teacher and learner etc. (NCTE module, 2015). He was a true disciple of his guru as he tried till his last breath to wipe off the tears of his fellow being as the task given to him by his revered guru. Our true homage to him as teacher educators will be to follow the path shown by him by preparing the citizens by providing them the good teacher who can fulfill the dreams of swami ji by preparing a good human being. Swami ji dreamt that “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.”

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