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Swami Vivekananda's thoughts on education

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Abstract

Swami Ji's thoughts have been carefully sifted and analyzed for the benefit of prospective teacher educators. Swami Ji thought of 'education as a manifestation of perfection within an individual'. The real issue is as to how to attain this avowed goal. His comprehensive vision in this regard includes diverse matters ranging from quality and excellence to national integration, equality of educational opportunity, education of the masses, environmental education and management, women empowerment, and wellness life style through health, hygiene and yoga. On all these matters and many more, Swamiji was very articulate and forthright in advising the youth and various other audiences who used to throng on him.

Keywords: Quality, excellence, national integration, empowerment, hygiene

1. Introduction

According to Swamiji, we must have life-building, human-making, character-forming education. Needless to mention that now it is high time to assimilate and imbibe the true spirit of this averment. It calls for a radical shift in the prevailing paradigm of our system of education. Only those segments have been chosen which relate to quality and excellence, national integration, education of the masses, environmental education and management, women empowerment, wellness life style through health, hygiene and will provide a positive leeway for self-empowerment of teacher educators as emphatically stressed and commended by Swami Ji.

2. Quality and excellence

The chief instrument we have devised to further the ideal of individual fulfillment is the educational system. Education in the formal sense is only a part of the society's larger task of abetting the individual's intellectual, emotional and moral growth. This is a conception which far exceeds formal education in scope. It includes not only the intellect but the emotions, character and personality. It involves not only the surface, but deeper layers of thought and action. It involves adaptability, creativeness and vitality which Swami Vivekananda used to emphasize through his learned and inspiring discourses.

And it involves moral and spiritual growth. We say that we wish the individual to fulfill his potentialities, but obviously we do not wish to develop great criminals or great rascals. Learning for learning's sake isn't enough. Thieves learn cunning, and slaves learn submissiveness. We may learn things that constrict our vision and warp our judgment. We wish to foster fulfillment within the framework of rational and moral strivings which have characterized man at his best. In a world of huge organizations and vast social forces that dwarf and threaten the individual, we must range ourselves whenever possible on the side of individuality; but we cannot applaud an irresponsible, amoral or wholly self-gratifying individuality. Our greatness had been the greatness of a free people who shared certain moral commitments. Freedom without moral commitment is aimless and promptly self-destructive. It is an ironic fact that as Individuals in our society have moved toward conformity in their outward behaviour, they have moved away from any sense of deeply-shared purposes. We must restore both a vigorous sense of individuality and a sense of shared purposes. Either without the other leads to consequences abhorrent to us.

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3. Equality and equity

Etymologically the term equality may be traced from the word "isotes", used by the Greeks twenty five centuries ago. Since then it has been elaborated and refined by the philosophical, politico-social, economic and religious thought. Aristotle's principle of proportional equality sought to confer honours on individuals commensurate with differences in abilities. The cult of equality was vouchsafed by the Western philosophers like Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, and Voltaire. Whereas Rousseau spoke for leveling the possessions of man, Voltaire said that all men have equal protection of law. He dismissed the notion of equality as a leveler of goods, possessions and powers, because he thought it to be unnatural. The revolutions in U.S.A. (1776) and France (1789) were the result of the slogan of "equality, fraternity and liberty". In the nineteenth century, the philosophy of utilitarianism, as represented by Bentham, James Mill and others propagated the gospel of "greatest good of the greatest numbers". As a result of this, the principle of equality pervaded all the fields of human activity-political, social, economic and educational. Swamiji's inspiring speeches have contributed a lot to the emergence of the concept of equality and equity in this process of development. On December 10, 1948, the idea of equality was highlighted in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights by the General Assembly of the United Nations where, inter alia, the principles of "non-discrimination" and "right to education" were strongly advocated. These two principles inherited the concept of "equality of opportunity in education", which was elaborated on December 14, 1960 by the General Conference of UNESCO. According to UNESCO, the term discrimination includes "any distinction, exclusion, limitation or performance which being based on race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, economic condition or birth, has the purpose or the effect of nullifying or impairing equality of education belief in equality of educational opportunity is one thing, translating its concept into practical reality is another thing. Its implementation depends upon political system, economic dispensation and sociological factor. These are its determinants. Since the dawn of historic times either a state had accepted the obligation of equality or it has been demanded from the State to "give equal treatment and equal opportunity for advancement" to all subjects irrespective of caste, creed, colour, sex etc. The nature and implications of equality depend upon the politicians who are at the helm of affairs. Though scanty, yet there is an evidence that in early times of Indian history everyone had the right to education, whether one availed of it or not. The upanayana ceremony was obligatory for girls as much as for boys. However, some scholars aver that "right to education" was only in theory. In actual practice the Sudras did not enjoy this privilege and women too were not encouraged as they were considered incapable of pronouncing the Ved Mantras correctly. However, Budha was the first to revolt against the established caste-system, which smacked of inequalities by birth. Although the situation in medieval times in India did not substantially change, it is however generally believed that because of the concept of equality in Islam, education in India was open to all. This view, however, is refuted by Amin, who asserts that "in medieval India, education particularly higher education was not meant for the people but only for the elite." Swamiji and others

after him have fervently pleaded for a radical shift in our social transformation and let us hope that things will change as the time passes and effective polices to achieve this end will be put in place.

4. Women empowerment

Women empowerment has been considered a priority area in our country. Swami Vivekananda raised a clarion call to restore the dignity and image of the women by citing the words of Manu who said, 'where women are respected, there the gods delight, and where they are not, there all work and effort come to naught'. He wanted a female education which will put them in a position to solve their own problems in their own way. It is very difficult to understand why in this country so much difference is made between men and women whereas the Vedanta declares that one and the same self is present in all beings. Writing down Smritis etc., and binding them by hard rules, the men have turned the women into mere manufacturing machines. In the period of degradation, when the priests made the other castes incompetent to study the Vedas, they deprived the women also of all their rights. You will find in the Vedic and Upanishadic age Maitrevi, Gargi and other ladies of revered memory have taken the place of Rishis. In an assembly of a thousand Brahmanas who were all erudite in the Vedas, Gargi boldly challenged Yajnavalkya in a discussion about Brahman. Studying the present needs of the age, it seems imperative to train some of them up in the ideals of renunciation, so that they will take up the vow of life-long virginity, fired with the strength of that virtue of chastity which is innate in their blood from hoary antiquity. Our motherland requires for her well-being some of her children to become pure-souled Brahmacharins and Brahmacharinis. Even if one amongst the women became a knower of Brahman, then by the radiance of her personality, thousands of women would be inspired and awakened to Truth, and great well-being of the country and society would ensue. Brahmacharinis of education and character should take up the task of teaching. In villages and towns they must open centres and strive for the spread of female education. Through such devout preachers of character, there will be the real spread of female education in the country. History and puranas, house-keeping and the arts, the duties of home life and the principles that make for the development of character have to be taught. Other matters such as sewing, culinary art, rules of domestic work and upbringing of children will also be taught. Japa, worship and meditation shall form an indispensable part of the teaching. Along with other things they should acquire the spirit of valour and heroism. In the present day, it has become necessary for them also to learn self-defence –how grand was the Queen of Jhansi! So shall we bring to the need of India great fearless women – women worthy to continue the traditions of Sanghamittra, Lila, Ahalya Bai, and Mira Bai – women fit to be mothers of heroes, because they are pure and fearless strong with the strength that comes of touching the feet of God. We must see to their growing up as ideal matrons of home in time. The children of such mothers will make further progress in the virtues that distinguish themselves. It is only in the homes of educated and pious mothers that great men are born. If the women are raised, their children will by their noble actions glorify the name of the country; then will culture, knowledge, power and devotion awaken in the country.

5. Education of the masses

Swamiji had a very strong view on the subject of education of the masses. He considered it as the only solution for solving our problems of discrimination practiced in the most invisible to visible forms. His advocacy was that education should reach every home and the medium of instruction should be the vernacular – the mother tongue. The exposition which follows is a very lucid, forceful and persuasive rendering of the subject by Swamiji. It needs close attention for suitably organizing and orienting ideas and frame of reference. My heart aches to think of the condition of the poor, the low in India. They sink lower and lower every day. They feel the blow showered upon them by a cruel society, but they do not know whence the blow comes. They have forgotten that they too are men. My heart is too full to express my feelings. So long as the millions live in hunger and ignorance, I hold every man a traitor who, having been educated at their expenses, pays not the least heed to them. Our great national sin is the neglect of the masses and that is the cause of our downfall. No amount of politics would be of any avail until the masses in India are once more well-educated. The chief cause of India's ruin has been the monopolizing of the whole education and intelligence of the 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 to be done for our lower classes is to give them education 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 nation, 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. Ours is to put the chemicals together, the crystallization comes in the law of nature. My idea is first of all to bring out the gems of spirituality that are stored up in our books and in the possession of a few only, hidden as it were in the monasteries and forests- to bring them out; to bring the knowledge out of them, not only from the hands where it is hidden, but from the still more inaccessible chest, the language in which it is preserved, the incrustation of centuries of Sanskrit words. In one word, I want to make them popular. I want to bring out these ideas and let them be the common property of all, of every man in India, whether he knows the Sanskrit language or not. The great difficulty in the way is the Sanskrit language, this glorious language of ours, and this difficulty cannot be removed until, if it is possible, the whole of our nation are good Sanskrit scholars. You will understand the difficulty when I tell you that I have been studying this language all my life and yet every new book is new to me. At the same time Sanskrit education must go along with it, because the very sound of Sanskrit words gives a prestige, a power and a strength to the race. Even the great Buddha made one false step when he stopped the Sanskrit language from being studied by the masses. He wanted rapid and immediate results; and translated and preached in the language of the day-Pali. That was grand; he spoke the language of the people and the people understood him. It spread the ideas quickly and made them reach far and wide. But along with that Sanskrit ought to have been spread. Knowledge came, but prestige was not there. Until you give them that, there will be another caste created, having the advantage of the Sanskrit language, which will quickly get above the rest.

6. Environmental education and management

Environmental education could be seen as just another of a number of pressures on already over-crowded teacher education programmes. As with schools and teachers, teacher educators are often called upon to help assuage society's problems. This is to be expected given the government funds allocated to education and the desire for schooling to be relevant to social questions, issues and problems. Thus, there are demands that education be vocationally relevant, promote intercultural appreciation and harmony, develop personal and interpersonal skills encourage active and informed citizenship, and so on. Hazlett (1979) has described the policy process through which governments "reduce political, social, and economic problems to educational ones and ... expect schools to cure present ills and provide for a brighter tomorrow for individuals and the collectivity."

Multi-cultural education, school-industry links, consumer education, drug education, HIV/AIDS education and so on are examples of numerous curriculum responses to this process. There is some debate about the ethics and motivations of this process and about the style of decision making often involved. However, there can be little dispute over the fact that such 'educational problems' and associated curriculum developments in schools place additional demands on teachers and teacher education programmes. Many schools and colleges in the Asia-Pacific region have been motivated by student, parent and teacher interest in this issue of sustainability to incorporate environmental education into their schools, and have developed a range of innovative programmes and activities. They have been supported by the policy processes within education systems and the provision of guidelines, resources, and opportunities for professional development. Teacher educators, especially in science, social studies and geography curriculum studies courses, have responded in a number of ways to the growing need for professional development in environmental education also. However, despite the rising interest in environmental education in schools and the expectations of governments that environmental education will play a role in maintaining the sustainability of ecosystems, several evaluation studies of environmental education indicate cause for concern. These studies of environmental education indicate cause for concern. These studies which are detailed later indicate that good practice in environmental education is not widespread as education systems and policies would like and that, even with the best of intentions, many schools and teachers have difficulty implementing the full range of objectives and strategies for environmental education. One of the explanations for this is the very low percentage of teachers who have received either pre-service studies or undertaken in-service professional development in environmental education.

7. National integration

The Indian people comprise many communities, and Indian culture consists of diverse cultures that have been assimilating and also rejecting each other. There have been many conflicts of different types in our history, but on the whole we are justified in saying that Indian life has been significant as an example of the co-existence of communities and cultures. But we can make the mistake of regarding only the community as the unit of our nation and

not the individuals of whom these communities consist. The community represents a belief, a moral code, a culture. All these are abstract things. They become concrete when individuals act and behave in accordance with the belief, the moral code and culture of their community. And these individuals remain individuals, no matter what beliefs they profess and what their practices and actions are. Communities do not think and act as a whole. It is the individuals who think and act. If individuals have the gift of leadership or the ability to collect other individuals around them, they find it to their advantage to represent or profess to represent a whole community. They may succeed in making the majority or the majority of the active members of their community accept them as their representative. But if we keep our minds clear of illusions, we can still distinguish between the community as a whole and those who claim to be its representatives, and even among those who are recognised as representatives we can distinguish between individuals who are acting deliberately and consciously and those who are just following the natural herd instinct of man. The process of national integration takes place primarily within the individual. If India were a country inhabited by the people of one race, speaking one language, professing one religion, but did not possess a sufficient number of individuals who consciously identified themselves with it to an effective degree, it would remain in fact, unintegrated. We have only to look at the history of the world to discover examples of communities that failed to achieve integration, in spite of possessing all the reasons for unity and cooperation. We can discover also examples of nations integrated by a sense of common purpose in spite of differences of race or of language or of religion. If we analyse our freedom movement, we shall find that its momentum derived very largely from the fact that one person-Mahatma Gandhi-identified himself with a certain moral value which is typically Indian-non violence. Mahatma Gandhi deduced his belief, his political policy, his constructive programme, his social reform from his doctrine of non-violence. Usually patriotism, which is taken to be an index of Integration, is a projection of family relationship, group interests, desire for self-assertion and self-preservation as a people. These sentiments are national. But they can also mislead. They can create situations in which one loyalty or interest comes into conflict with another and the nation is split up, or material interest runs counter to moral principle, and moral principle is sacrificed. But there can be points of identification along with group and mass sentiments and interests which will provide a safer emotional anchorage and a more personal means of self-realisation. There can be no question about the overriding value of national integration. But just because of its basic importance, all other considerations must be subordinated to it. In the matter of benefits conferred through economic, social and educational policies, it is possible to plan the distribution geographically, class wise, strictly in accordance with justice. But where such methods of distribution clash with the interest of national integration, they should be modified. A nation should have a national language. History provides instances of the sentiment of nationalism growing around or because of a common language. But history and contemporary facts also provide instances, such as Switzerland and Yugoslavia, where the recognition of all the languages spoken in the country as national languages had been a means of integration. It may

be remembered that the approach to the problem of a national language, if it is too logical or dogmatic, may injure the interest it is meant to serve.

8. Towards wellness lifestyle – through health, hygiene and yoga

Wellness is generally used to mean a healthy balance of the mind, body and spirit that results in an overall feeling of well-being. It is equivalent to the concept of 'Sthitpragya' described in Bhagwatgita and to which Swamiji used to refer frequently in his talks. It is an indicator of the presence of an 'equanimous mind' that is achieved through concentration and self-discipline. Wellness programs vary depending on the target market and who is promoting them. Wellness programs are most commonly promoted in progressive companies, schools and education enterprises of repute alongwith personal wellness programs marketed directly to health seeking individuals. Such programs attempt to facilitate life improvements and quality of life though recommending positive lifestyle changes. Wellness programs are often pursued by people seeking recovery from an illness or specific health condition or by those interested in improving their overall health.

8.1. Health

Health is the level of functional or metabolic efficiency of a living organism. In humans, it is the general condition of a person's mind and body, usually meaning to be free from illness, injury or pain (as in "good health" or "healthy"). The World Health Organization (WHO) defined health in its broader sense in 1946 as "a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity." Although this definition has been subject to controversy, in particular as lacking operational value and because of the problem created by use of the word "complete," it remains the most enduring. Other definitions have been proposed, among which a recent definition that correlates health and personal satisfaction. An increasing number of studies and reports from different organizations and contexts examine the linkages between health and different factors, including lifestyles, environments, health care organization, and health policy.

Focusing more on lifestyle issues and their relationships with functional health, data from the Alameda County Study suggested that people can improve their health via exercise, enough sleep, maintaining a healthy body weight, limiting alcohol use, and avoiding smoking. The ability to adapt and to self-manage has been suggested as core components of human health. The environment is often cited as an important factor influencing the health status of individuals. This includes characteristics of the natural environment, the built environment, and the social environment. Factors such as clean water and air, adequate housing, and safe communities and roads all have been found to contribute to good health, especially to the health of infants and children. Some studies have shown that a lack of neighbourhood recreational spaces including natural environment leads to lower levels of personal satisfaction and higher levels of obesity, linked to lower overall health and well-being. This suggests that the positive health benefits of natural space in urban neighbourhoods should be taken into account in public policy and land use.

Mental illness is described as 'the spectrum of cognitive, emotional, and behavioural conditions that interfere with

social and emotional well-being and the lives and productivity of people. Having a mental illness can seriously impair, temporarily or permanently, the mental functioning of a person. Other terms include: 'mental health problem', 'illness', 'disorder', 'dysfunction'.

Over the year it has been reported that many teens suffer from mental health issues in response to the pressures of society and social problems they encounter. Some of the key mental health issues seen in teens are: depression, eating disorders, and drug abuse. There are many ways to prevent these health issues from occurring such as communicating well with your child or a teen suffering from mental health issues. Also, remember that mental health can be treated and be attentive to your child's behaviour.

8.2 Hygiene

Hygiene (which comes from the name of the Greek goddess of health, Hygieia), is a set of practices performed for the preservation of health. Whereas in popular culture and parlance it can often mean mere "cleanliness", hygiene in its fullest and original meaning goes much beyond that to include all circumstances and practices, lifestyle issues, premises and commodities that engender a safe and healthy environment. While in modern medical sciences there is a set of standards of hygiene recommended for different situation, what is considered hygienic or not can vary between different cultures, genders and groups. Some regular hygienic practices may be considered good habits by a society while the neglect of hygiene can be considered disgusting, disrespectful or even threatening. Hygiene in home and everyday life settings plays an important part in preventing spread of infectious diseases. It includes procedures used in a variety of domestic situations such as hand hygiene, respiratory hygiene, food and water hygiene, general home hygiene (hygiene of environmental sites and surfaces), care of domestic animals, and home healthcare (the care of those who are at greater risk of infection).

Good home hygiene means targeting hygiene procedures at critical points, at appropriate times, to break the chain of infection i.e. to eliminate germs before they can spread further. Because the "infectious dose" for some pathogens can be very small (10-100 viable units, or even less for some viruses), and infection can result from direct transfer from surfaces via hands or food to the mouth, nasal mucosa or the eye, 'hygienic cleaning' procedures should be sufficient to eliminate pathogens from critical surfaces.

8.3 Yoga

The origin of Yoga has been speculated to date back to pre-vedic Indian traditions. The earliest accounts of yoga-practices are available in the Buddhist Nikayas. Parallel developments were recorded around 400BC in the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali, which combines pre-philosophical speculations and diverse ascetic practices of the first millennium BC with Samkhya-philosophy. Yoga gurus from India later introduced yoga to the west, following the success of Swami Vivekananda in the late 19th and early 20th century.

Yoga physiology described humans as existing of three bodies (physical, subtle and causal) and five (sheaths) (food sheath, prana-breath, mind sheath, intellect, and bliss) which cover the atman, and energy flowing through energy channels and concentrated in chakras. Many studies have tried to determine the effectiveness of yoga as a

complementary intervention for cancer, schizophrenia, asthma, and heart disease and it is being widely used now for stress management and wellness life style. According to Panini, a 6th century BC Sanskrit grammarian, the term yoga can be derived from either of two roots, yujir yoga (to yoke) or yuj samadhau (to concentrate). In the context of the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali, the root yuj samadhau (to concentrate) is considered by traditional commentators as the correct etymology. In accordance with Panini, Vyasa who wrote the first commentary on the Yoga Sutra, states that yoga means samadhi (concentration). In other contexts, such as the Bhagavad Gita and the Hatha Yoga Pradipika, the word yoga has been used in conformity with yujir. Someone who practices yoga or follows the yoga philosophy with a high level of commitment is called a yogi (applied to a male) or yogini (denoting a female). Apart from the spiritual goals, the physical postures of yoga are used to alleviate health problems, reduce stress and make the spine supple in contemporary times. Yoga is also used as a complete exercise program and physical therapy routine.

9. Conclusion

Thus Swami ji's thoughts have been carefully sifted and analyzed for the benefit of prospective teacher educators. We must have life-building, human-making, character-forming education. Needless to mention that now it is high time to assimilate and imbibe the true spirit of this averment. It calls for a radical shift in the prevailing paradigm of our system of education. His comprehensive vision in this regard includes diverse matters ranging from quality and excellence to national integration, equality of educational opportunity, education of the masses, environmental education and management, women empowerment, and wellness life style through health, hygiene and yoga. On all these matters and many more, Swamiji was very articulate and forthright in advising the youth.

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