



ISSN Print: 2394-7500
ISSN Online: 2394-5869
Impact Factor: 5.2
IJAR 2015; 1(9): 26-29
www.allresearchjournal.com
Received: 14-06-2015
Accepted: 17-07-2015

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Educational concept of Swami Abhedananda- vistas of a New Horizon

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Abstract

This article mainly deals with the most fundamental theories of Swami Abhedananda. Till now many eminent people have given their educational ideas and this article conveys to us how Abhedananda gave the final shape to those ideas to present them to the people of the world. This article also explains why Swami Abhedananda emphasized the learning of Sanskrit and the adoption of the Japanese model in India.

Keywords: fundamental theories, Sanskrit language, Japanese model

1. Introduction

Prelude

Swami Abhedananda's life was divine, his gifts were divine as also his accomplishments. But even in his pre monastic life, when he was Kaliprasad Chandra, son of Rasiklal Chandra, he had an impressive beginning. The legacy he got from his father – a distinguished professor of English in the then Calcutta who had an illustrious band of distinguished students, was largely distinguished students, was largely instrumental in forming the intellectual embryo of kaliprasad in his boyhood days. This included the father's proficiency in and love for English literature; also to be included is his father's remarkable admiration for Thomas Paine's celebrated book 'Age of Reason'. His father made a searching analysis of Paine's rational outlook of Biblical matters. Kaliprasad was deeply impressed by his father's approach and attitude. Later on, in his celebrated lectures in the U.S.A, the Swami tried to exemplify the merge of scientific and religious concept and broadened his thoughts on "scientific Religion".

Even when Kaliprasad was a student of oriental seminary in North Calcutta – the throbbing centre of Kolkata's celebrated Babu culture- he began to study Sanskrit literature, poetics and Grammar from famous Hindoo scholars of those days. He wanted to master the nuances of Sanskrit – the fountain head of age- old heritage of ancient India.

In regular classes in the school he began to study India's past History and cultural glory. He began to be attracted toward's the famous sin system of Hindoo philosophy. He studied in a systematic manner the doctrine of Acharya Sankara and young kali's intellect was propelled towards the Doctrine of Monism. Kali began to cherish the ardent Hope to become a world-renowned philosopher and declared empathetically before his class teacher, "a philosopher goes below the surface and studies the cause of think". Kali was deeply drawn towards the patanjali system of philosophy and began to show keen interest in the Indian system of Yoga. He met Sri Ramakrishna in the Temple of Rani Rasmoni in the middle of 1884 A.D. and was spiritually initiated by him. Thus kali become a life- long devotee of Sri Thakur. Kali began taking spiritual lessons from Sri Thakur and began to feel and taste spiritual joy and bliss. When Sri Thakur was seriously ill kali life his studies, paternal home and begane to serve his Master in cossipore garden hence kali attended public lecture of Science Association (founded by Dr. Mahendralal Sircar) walking the long distance between cossipore and Boubazar. He thus evinced his keen interest in scientist and their discoveries and indicated formation of rational temperament in his outlook and attitude.

When he was attending The Thakur during his seriously sick period, young kali was engrossed in serious academic pursuits. He studied Physics, Astronomy and J.S. Mill's

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epoch – making treatise on “logic” and “Three Essays on Religion.” Kali also studied History of philosophy. Sri Thakur prophetically visualised Kali's role in educating Western people and forming their spiritual and moral beliefs and blessed him in his intellectual journey and spiritual ministrations. After Thakur's demise Kali took the vow of the monk and began to live an austere life in Baranagar Math. His only companion was treatises on Vedanta philosophy – particularly his real field of interest was Monism and its deep and varied implication, with special emphasis Shankai's Approach and explanation.

Meanwhile he became a full Sannyasi and took the name Swami Abhedananda. In the meantime he went to Gajababa and helped various translations of Panini's Grammar (from Sanskrit to English). The Swami's deep erudition and meaningful insight into Indian system of Grammar and phonetics helped the translators a lot and the translation in English was a wonderful one, giving real insight into Indian system of Grammar and linguistics. Back to his motherland permanently, the Swami in 1921-22 evinced particular interest in the works relating to education and he was glad when he knew that Ramakrishna Mission had taken up the educational scheme in right earnest. He said “Our boys should have all –round growth – spiritual, moral, intellectual and physical.” Here the Swami expressed close resemblance to the thought of Vivekananda who insisted on man-making and character building education.

The Swami knew that what India needed most was material prosperity and that depended entirely on industrial development of the nation. We recollect the Swami's comments in this context, “you must encourage the industry of your own country. I have a great desire to have an ideal Institute of national industry established in India. One Tata project is not enough for India. She must have other factories in other parts of the country. One is not enough to fill the demands of 320 million of people.” (Bagchi)

We know that the Swami returned to India when a resurgent wave of national spirit was sweeping our country and the political map of India was then about to undergo a transformation under the bold and dynamic leadership of Gandhi – the Mahatma. But the Swami went a step further. His constructive genius went far beyond the narrow confines of political agitation. The Swami's plan of action meant advancing thought hard and selfless work. For this reason the Swami called the youth of the country with the clarion call and trumped words “you must work or perish”.

Analysis of critical Exposition of Fundamental concept and Nodal Ideas

1. Man –making and character- building educational ideals to be imbibed in early childhood.
2. Sanskrit to be learnt and expertise to be obtained in that language
3. English to be mastered as the means of Scientific education
4. Engineering skill knowledge to be imbibed from Technological college of excellent standard. This should be industry – oriented. It will help in the formation of National Industry, we should follow Japanese model.
5. Female Education and Women Emancipation, in the context of Indian Renaissance.

1. Our students should be trained along the lines of Brahmachari of ancient India in the Vedic age. They

should be guided to keep them – selves away from the temptations and lust of Worldly life. In this way they should be made ideal receptacle of education. They should be made to realise that without the evolution of their inherent potentialities their efforts would be futile. The knowledge thus gained should be used to pay the debts of society for the benevolence of mind. The interest of other should be predominant in their mind, over their petty self-interest. “Service before self” – should be their lifelong motto.

2. To the Swami, Sanskrit remained the Eternal Link between Vedic India and India under British Domination. Thus is the reason he attained remarkable proficiency in that language in early boyhood. Every student of the modern age should learn Sanskrit to share the cultural legacy of India – the Motherland. That ancient sages of our country preached the noble Doctrine of ‘unity in Diversity’ should be clear to our students so that they can understand the secular and pluralistic character of Indian Society. To achieve this end, Sanskrit should be compulsory for them. The various hymns and pious slokas should be ideal stepping stone for them to build their character. Moreover, mastery over Sanskrit should make the students familiar with the singular achievements of ancient Hindus in different aspects of Science, Engineering and Humanities.
3. We should note that the Swami spent 25 years of his life in the West in America and Europe to spread ideals of Vedanta. He established deep friendship and understanding with the people of the West through his wonderful command of their mother tongue i.e English. The Swami realized quite correct – that scientific Education of the present ages should be mastered through English only. Thus he repeatedly asked students of Bengali, of Madras – the whole of India – to attain command over English, so that they can know the advancement of scientific knowledge.
4. The remarkable progress of a tiny country like Japan in Industry and commerce impressed Swami very much. He repeatedly talked about Japanese Model before our students. The Swami urged the Tatas in his speech at Jamshedpur (Steel Town) to establish industry in different parts of India. The Swami also wanted that excellent Technical colleges should be set-up so that our students can learn expertise and skill and knowledge. Only the problem of Employment will produce good which the Indians require. This is the secret of success of Japanese Model and the Swami wanted Indian students to follow and pursue that model. Japanese Model is very much necessary to utilise the large manpower of India.
5. The Swami knew that 50% of Indian people are women. They deserve the right type of Education, so that they can cherish their role in national – building and maintain peace in family. The women should have separate type of schools, to be run by women teachers of repute. Those schools to be completely free from male interference. The girl students of those schools should imbibe classical Indian values. They should learn the values. They should learn the values of Discipline, Honesty and Neatness in the family. They should know that they are going to be the future leaders of the country and they should be torch- bearers of Indian values – Vedic ideals, religious tolerance and awareness

of Indian scriptures. The Indian female students should realize that their training should make them fit to carry forward ideals of women Emancipation. The Swami was so progressive that he was eloquent about women liberation about a hundred years back on the soil of the Indian sub-continent.

Essence of Swamiji's thoughts, culminating in a Grand Synthetic:

The Swami told Prof. Dr. Jackson- the celebrated Sanskrit scholar of Columbia University that the governing ; whereas the basic tenets of all Asiatic Civilizations be it Indian, Chinese or Japanese is Kartavyam i.e what you owe to yourself, to your society, to your community, to your people, to your country and lastly to the world at large when one uses the term 'Right' you are thinking of what you think of kartavyam, you are thinking of what you owe to other therein lies the fundamental difference. The Swami is of the most interesting opinion that, the Doctrine of Right has been adopted in the West largely because of its urban character of civilization. The Swami comments that from the time of the Roman civilization, people have migrated to towns from and villages the towns have always shaped the character of the people as a whole. The Swami has added in his comments that in the East, industries have never been popular and Asiatic civilizations are always static in nature, as opposed to dynamic civilization in the West. In the West people are to a large extent migration and it is essential that each man should remember what rights he is going to acquire and what rights he has to surrender. Thus people in the West put more emphasis on the rights than an duty.

In the East, people are really static, institutions are more or less fixed and their rights are more fixed and people learn duty more. Education from both East and West should come together, investigate their differences and find ways learning to more harmonious cooperation. The right moment has arrived when thinkers from both East and West should meet and evolve by diligent labour and understanding a reasonable presentation of the future which will embody the essential feature of their cultural principles.

Those eminent thinkers should strive and evolve a broad basis of pan-world civilization, combining the best features of both the East and the West. Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high where the knowledge in free-these ideas as depicted by Tagore in the Upanishads of ancient India should be the ideal of a pan-world culture. The educational principals of Swami Abhedananda beckon us towards this glowing horizon.

Swami Abhedananda's Hope for the Future

In a series of lecture (the Swami gave in America a service of lecture in 1905) collected in "India and Her people" the Swami expressed the hope for a brighter and rejuvenated India.

He hope and made comments thus, 'India needs to-day free education and free industrial and technical schools and college for the masses. India needs schools and colleges for the education of girls, not under the management of christens people but under the management of the Hindus'. The Swami expressed the opinion that India needs a national university where boys and will received secular education free of charge and where all technical and manual training can be obtained freely. Swami continued in his impassioned tone that, "Today the Hindus have shown to the world that

intellectual they are sharp but they are downtrodden and poor. The Hindus are eager to learn and they are indebted to England for introducing Western education in India.' The Swami's prophetic comments was 'The seed of Western education is sown in the soil of India; future generation will reap the fruit.

Herbert Spencer – the doyen of British philosopher once remarked that, 'Education is training for completeness of life'. Recalling the social and political ambience in India during to his impassioned opinion, 'The Hindus now see the defect of the present system of education in India and are endeavoring to reform it and to make it as perfect as it is the land of free education and political Independent. May their noble efforts be crowned with glorious success.

Cardinal Principles in the concept of Education as propagated by Swami Abhedananda

It was not only a firm belief but a strong pillar of the Swami's concept that, the standard of education must go parallel with the culture and civilization of a nation.

In the Vedas period, the Indo- Aryans developed their massive scriptures, knowledge as the vedic literature. All these are in the Sanskrit language long before the art of writing was known these Vedas were studied taught from mouth to mouth. The study of these sacred scriptures formed the most integral part of the education of the boys and girls of Brahminis, Kshatriyas, Vaishya. The Swami penetratingly observed that the main objects of education at that time was the moral and spiritual culture of the soul and the attainment of God- consciousness. Along with the Vedas the brilliant students had to learn the six vedangas - the first was shiksha or the science of phonetics this science explains the correct pronunciation of the Sanskrit words and texts used in the Vedas. The second was chhands or metre. The Vedic hymns have different metres and one must know them properly in order to read of chant correction. The students of India in the vedic period used to study meter as also the science of pronunciation and grammar. Indians of that period (as early 1400 B.C) had a scientific Grammar. There was Nirukta- a prominent vedanga describe as well as the use of the same word in various senses. There was kalpa- another Vedangas, which included shrouta Sutras, Dharma Sutras, Sulva Sutras, Grihy Sutras.

The last Vedanga was Jyotish or Astronomy. The students studied Astronomy to fix in order to determine the correct moment of sacrifice and other rites. This is the reason why there were many astronomical referances in the Vedas.

Swami's reference to public place for instructions in post Vedic period

There were many public places for instructions. The courts of progressive kings and maharajaha were the principal seats of learning where education was bestowed free of charge. During 1000 B.C there arose parishads which corresponded to the universities of Europe – the collegiate institutions of learning. These public institutions were started by Brahmin professors and scholars. The student in them used to stay with the teachers and do some work in their househ older in return for free board and tuition. Prof. Max Miller made extensive references thus. "a parishad used to consist of 21 Brahmans well versed in philosophy, theology and law. Sometime three or four learned Brahmin scholars would form a small parishad in a village." In the Upanishads we find mention of this kind of ancient Hindu University

system.

Swami Abhedananda goes on to say that, in those college were taught Vedas, Philosophy, Theology and Hindu law - civil and criminal.

There were also medical schools for the study of Ayurveda. This is the Science of Life. In contain Hindu materia medica which is much older than 6th century B.C. Even in the early pre Buddha age, Hindu Medicine arranged for separate schools and college for Medical student. The contribution of charak and sushruta are still remembering.

Chemistry in Sanskrit Rasayana was also familiar to the Hindu from very early times. The alkalies and acids were early known to the Hindus. The medicinal use of metals was also largely known. Swami Abhedananda recalled the Comments in the famous treatise written by him called Hindu Medicine.

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