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Narendra to Swami Vivekananda: A perspective

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Abstract

In every society, there are two types of people; on the one hand we have one, who works for the elevation of the people, and on the other hand one who pretends to work for society; rather they get benefits from it. In India, there have been many great people who dedicated their lives to society so as to eradicate social evils. They are called social reformers such as Swami Dayananda Saraswati, Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa Dev, Swami Vivekananda etc. Swami Vivekananda exercised on spirituality, education, poverty, religion, women, Indian culture in his short life-span and inspired to others also. Swami Vivekananda strongly believed in *Advetva Vedanta* and try to find out the panacea of all the problems as well as the answers of his queries on *Maya* and *Jiva* from the *Vedas*. He also introduced the concept of Practical Vedanta and whole world accepted it.

Keywords: Vedas, Upnishads, Advetva Vedanta, Jiva, Adi Shankaracharya, Atman, Bhakti Yoga, Karma Yoga, Raja Yoga, Jnana Yoga, Spirituality, Humanity.

1. Introduction

In every society, a number of people contribute to its development. The two important factors society operates on are its people and their ideology. There are two types of people; on the one hand we have one, who works for the elevation of the people, and on the other hand one who pretends to work for society; rather they get benefits from it. They can also be classified as donor and pseudo-donor.

When we talk about Indian custom, we find that social service, as our history boasts of, is in our blood from the time immemorial. So we respect our social workers. Our great India literature also abounds in examples of humanity and social structure where people rendered their services to the pious cause. In India, there have been many great people who dedicated their lives to society so as to eradicate social evils. They are called social reformers. The pre-independence period witnessed some famous Indian social reformers such as Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Swami Dayananda Saraswati, Swami Shradhanand, Swami Vivekananda, Mahamata Gandhi etc.

The donor who actually and selflessly works and about whom we have already talked can further be segmented in two; the spiritual and the social reformer. In the first category comes guru like *Adi Shankaracharya* whose contribution for the improvement of society is worth-citing. The second category encompasses reformers such as Swami Dayananda Saraswati, Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa Dev, Swami Vivekananda etc. who are both spiritual and social.

Being a student of Indian Philosophy, I am highly inspired by Swami Vivekananda's philosophical approaches towards society. In his short life-span which lasted only 39 years, he exercised great influence on people by working on spirituality, education, poverty, religion, women, Indian culture, etc.

Swami Vivekananda was born on 12th January 1863 in Calcutta. His parents named him Vireswar, later on, he was known as Narendra. He belonged to a well-known educated family. His father Viswanath Datta was a prestigious high court lawyer, and his mother Bhuvaneshwari Devi was a religious woman. Swami Vivekananda's childhood was just like that of the other boys of his age. But his curiosity to know God and the true existence of the world made him different. He wanted to understand the reality of the universe. At this age, he knew that to comprehend the reality, he needed a true teacher. So before making somebody else's his teacher, he wanted some of his questions about God to be satisfactorily

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answered. He searched for the right teacher, who could guide him the right path of God. It, therefore, shows that he was very much curious from his childhood.

In 1881, when Narendra was studying in the General Assembly Institution, Prof. W.W. Hastie, the principal, while explaining the word "TRANCE" in Wordsworth's "The Excursion", said "Such experience is the result of the purity of mind and concentration on some particular objects, and it is rare indeed, particularly in these days. I have seen only one person who has experienced that blessed state of mind, and he is Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa Dev of Dakshineswar. You can understand if you go there and see for yourself.

This was when Swami Vivekananda started coming to Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa Dev ashram to experience the blessed state of mind. He continuously remained in touch with Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa Dev and accepted him his guru.

In 1886, Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa Dev passed away and left the responsibilities of his disciples on Narendra. He then along with other disciples renounced to accomplish the mission of his spiritual teacher. This is when Narendra transformed himself into Swami Vivekananda. After renouncement, he travelled pan India and understood all the issues India was facing at that time. He decided to participate in the World Religious Congress held in America in 1893. His visit to the congress was the turning point of Swami Vivekananda's life; he was globally recognized after that.

Swami Vivekananda strongly believed in Indian philosophy and *Advaita Vedanta*. He studied the *Vedas* and the *Upanishads*. He knew that the root cause of all the problems was ignorance, and he could find out the panacea of all problems as well as the answers of his queries on *Maya* and *Jiva* from the *Vedas*.

Binding the whole world to the religion, he advocated for the unity and social services which is altogether known as Universal Religion. Religion is deeply rooted in man and his blood since his birth. It is a relationship between soul and God. In simple word we define religion an organized system of beliefs, ceremonies, and rules used to worship a god or a group of gods or an interest, a belief, or an activity that is very important to a person or group is called religion. If we talk about in detail it is "a set of beliefs concerning the cause, nature, and purpose of the universe, especially when considered as the creation of a superhuman agency or agencies, usually involving devotional and ritual observances, and often containing a moral code governing the conduct of human affairs."¹

Swami Vivekananda explains that religion doesn't consist of erecting temples or building churches or attending public worship. In simple words, religion consists of realization. Therefore, spiritual realization is religion. Swami Vivekananda said that "I shall try to bring before you the Hindu theory that religions do not come from without, but from within. It is my belief that religious thought is in man's very constitution, so much so that it is impossible for him to give up religion until he can give up his mind and body, until he can give up his thought and life."²

He further said that the supreme reality is the only source of happiness. True religion teaches us that the goal of life has to be sought in *Atman* only. Swami Vivekananda gave equal importance to all the religions in the world. He illustrates from the Islam. The followers of Islam are equal. This is the special quality of that religion. What comes to preach to the world is their faith.

In Hinduism spirituality is its soul. Swami Vivekananda focused out that "in no other religion, in no other sacred books of the world will you find so much energy spent in defining the idea of God. They tried to define the idea of soul, so that no earthly touch might mar it. The spirit must be divine; and the spirit understood as spirit must not be made into a man. The same idea of unity, of the realization of god, the omnipresent, is preached throughout. They think it is all nonsense to say that he lives in Heaven, and all that."³ Spirituality is the main essence in Hinduism.

Whole of the world community is expecting a religion, which is acceptable to the whole world. Humanity of one of them. Humanity in the society with different social organization are representing different needs of the man. Man and his spiritual aspiration and struggles are represented by the various religions of the world. The various world religions have been indulging in mutual criticism, vilification and persecutions. Swami Vivekananda told that "we must understand all of those religions have proved their strength, their worth and their necessity for mankind."⁴

He understood the equal status of all the religions and the religious plurality in human society. He also said that "each religion, as it were, takes up one part of the great universal truth and spends its whole force in embodying and typifying that part of the truth. It is therefore, an addition and not exclusion."⁵

All the religions of the world together constitute one whole. All religions are valid means to the same end. It is not necessary to change one religion. To enrich one's life, one can accept some of the good points in other religions. In Swami Vivekananda words, "my idea, therefore, is that all the religions are different forces in the economy of God, working for the good of mankind."⁶ It has shown his identification of equal status of all the religions.

Swami Vivekananda also suggested four methods of spiritual realization. These are called *Yogas*.

- I. Bhakti Yoga
- II. Karma Yoga
- III. Raja Yoga
- IV. Jnana Yoga.

Education: Swami Vivekananda's view is that education prepares an individual for the struggle for existence. It is not information of knowledge which will insert into the mind of a child by force. For getting a degree is not an education, the proper education must be viewed on the basis of character, mental powers, intelligence and inculcates. Swami Vivekananda believed that same omnipresent and omniscient soul resides in every man and in every animal – however weak, small or great. "The difference is not the soul, but in manifestation". In Swami Vivekananda words "Education is the manifestation of perfection already reached in man."⁷

According to Swami Vivekananda, education is a process in which the young minds, will receive strength, energy and vigorous character. By the way of getting this process, the individual will mould themselves of their life. "All knowledge and all powers are within. What we call power; secrets of nature and force are all within. All knowledge comes from the human soul. Man manifests knowledge, discovers it with himself, which is pre-existing through eternity."⁸

Swami Vivekananda was highly influenced by the classical Indian philosophy. His thoughts were mainly shaped by the

Vedanta and those are generally called *Neo-Vedanta*. His *Vedanta* is practical and not the abstract. He applied *Vedanta* to practical life. He strongly believed in the universal brotherhood of man and upliftment of mankind. Service and renunciation were the two key words which he believed most and tried to apply for the development of our society.

Swami Vivekananda also felt about the education that young boys and girls receive is very negative. He thinks they do not gain confidence or self-respect from this education, so according to Swami Vivekananda “only positive education should be given to children.”⁹ Swami Vivekananda told, “if young boys and girls are encouraged and are not unnecessarily criticized all the time, they are bound to improve in time.”¹⁰

He also told the youth: Set yourselves to the task of spreading education among the masses. Tell them and make them understand, "You are our brothers—a part and parcel of our bodies, and we love you and never hate you." ¹¹

Swami Vivekananda propagated education in his teachings without differences. He suggested education for several reasons, e.g. physical, self, shaping character, moral and religious, as well as for weaker section and women.

Physical Education: Healthy body healthy mind is he has suggested. He followed the same line and said that character building is not possible without the healthy body. He also said that “you will be nearer to Heaven through football than through the study of the *Gita*. You will understand the *Gita* better by your biceps, your muscles a little stronger. You will understand the *Upanishads* better and the glory of the *Atman*, when your body stands firm on your feet and you feel yourself as a man.”¹²

Self-Education: It means educated by one’s efforts rather than by formal instruction. In other words, educated through one’s own efforts without formal instruction. According to Swami Vivekananda, every person is having their own intelligence and behalf of his that intelligent, he can understand or realize or judge the things. Swami Vivekananda said “Knowledge is inherent in everyman’s soul.; no knowledge comes from the outside; it is all inside; What we say a man “knows”, should in strict psychological language.”¹³

Man Making Education: Swami Vivekananda highly believed that man making education play a vital role in developing the high values in life. “Education is not the amount of information that is put into your brain and runs riot there, undigested all your life. We must have life-building, man making, character making and assimilation of ideas. 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.”¹⁴ Knowing is unveiling. Education is the manifestation of the perfection already in man.

Man making education solves so many problems which are raised in present scenario. Man making education is must for everyone. If man-making education is imparted it is bound to have a negative impact on man. Therefore, Swami Vivekananda said, “any training that is based on negation is worse than death.”¹⁵

Moral And Religious Education: In Indian customs character building is the primary object of education from *Gurukula’s* to present education system. In society, we rate the peoples on his

character not the money. Without character no one give the respect as well as regards and character is born from moral and religious education.

Religious and moral education is a process where children and young people engage in a search for meaning, value and purpose in life. This involves both the exploration of beliefs and values and the study of how such beliefs and values are expressed.

Swami Vivekananda’s vision was clear on Moral and religious education. He said that “Moral and religion values are being determined. The fundamental principles of civilization are being ignored. Conflicts of ideals, manners and habits are pervading the atmosphere. Disregarded for everything old is the fashion of the day. Swami Vivekananda seeks all the information of these social and global evils through education. With this end in view he feels the dire need of awakening man to his self within, he thinks, lays the very purpose of education.

Education for Weaker Section: Everyone has the right to education, equally, irrespective his or her race or religion. Swami Vivekananda has a very clear vision on education and passionately believed that education should reach everyone be the rich or the poor; equally to all sections of society. He said that “if you want to uplift the backward classes of any society, you should educate him because education is one of the biggest powerful tools. He said that “education should spread to every household in the country, to factories, playing grounds and agriculture fields. If the children do not come to the school the teacher should reach them.”¹⁶

Women Education: He believed in equality in society not only between the have and the have-nots but also man and woman. Therefore, he criticized gender-based approach in society.

Educated women are capable of bringing socio-economic changes. Primary education is now a fundamental right. When a woman (or a girl) is ensured of her rights, the society at large is ensured of its sustainability. If a woman is educated it means society will economic boost up and property will spread everywhere. Educated women improved the life and health of her family. Swami Vivekananda also said that “that men and women are equally good in her or his way and those they should be judge according to their respective greatness. He further believed that if women are given the same opportunity as men, it is possible for women to attain the same level of development. He argued people not to think of themselves as men and women, but to see each other as human beings.”¹⁷

While emphasizing the need of education for women, Swami Vivekananda said “Our right of interference is limited entirely to giving education. Women must be put in a position to solve their own problems in their own way. No one can or ought to do this for them. And our Indian women are capable of doing it as any in the world.”¹⁸

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