

Relevance of Swami Vivekananda's views in the 21st century's education

Dr. Md Afsar Ali

Assistant Professor, Dept. of B.Ed., Acharya Jagadish Ch. Bose College, 1/1B, AJC Bose Road, Kolkata, West Bengal, India.

Abstract

The main focus of our education is human resource development. Emphasis is only on Cognitive domain, which stores only some factual information. Thus, the learners fail to perceive and to form clear conception. Education should be a balance of the three major dimensions viz. cognitive, affective and psychomotor of human development. The ultimate aim of education can't be achieved unless social reform, based on cultivation of spirituality is achieved. Thus, character, efficiency and humanism should be the aim of all education. The teacher should be a 'Tyagi' i.e., a selfless devotee to the cause of humanity and the Gurukul system should be the methodology of education, where the learner will be able to follow the teacher in his/her practical aspect of life instead of only observing the theoretical, polished side of teacher's life demonstrated purposefully before the others.

The aim of women education should be to make women strong, fear-less, and conscious of their chastity and dignity. Swami Vivekananda advocated for mass education as an essential condition for real progress. Ideal education can only eliminate all social conflicts and establish peace and tranquillity a pre-requisite for any development.

Keywords: human resource, factual information, spirituality, 'Tyagi', Gurukul system, chastity and dignity of women, mass education

Introduction

The only thing which differentiates human being from other creatures and makes them the best is Education. No other species takes birth at so dependable condition as the human babies. Human babies can't even afford to stand independently for a couple of months; they even can't differentiate between food and poison! Intervention and training by the adults are essential for their very survival. This in other ward is education. The off-springs of other creatures inherit these essential knowledge and skills for their survival. The question arises – why then our Creator took such apparently 'unjustified' decision? The answer lies in the concept of education. This signifies that human beings are so created that without education their survival is not possible in this Universe. Our nature is the big reservoir of vast unending resources meant for sustenance of life here. For every life took birth on this earth, his/her sustenance is present there in advance ^[1]. But all the creatures can't avail these sustenance in readily usable form. Human beings have to acquire some knowledge and skill in order to avail these sustenance in usable form. This process of acquiring necessary knowledge and skill about one's nature, environment, society and about oneself is called Education. So, education is not only a means of availing sustenance from the nature but also a necessary tool for the effective and sustainable dealing with our nature /environment. Hence, it can be said that education is training for real life. More, the members of a human society get educated more easy its life process will be. And at the same time more it will be able to manage its nature /society effectively and sustainably. As education benefits society, at the nuclear level it benefits/uplifts the life of individual members in the society also.

Ours is 21st century education. The main focus of this modern education is human resource development, i.e., every individual has to become a resource for the society. That is every educated person will be a useful member of the society. So, the concept for their training for real life is of paramount importance.

Because, it is the content, methodology, etc. of the training/education which determines the outcome of the product /quality of human individual produced. It is the training/education which converts a ferocious tiger into an agent of entertainment in circus before its natural game (the human being). So, the quality of an individual, society and nation depends upon the nature, quality and methodology of education. Swami Vivekananda is considered as one of the architects of modern India. So, it is very much pertinent to have an analysis of his views on education in 21st century, we are passing through.

Swamiji's View on the Components of Education

Education makes a baby into a complete man. A baby is born with diversified potentialities and every potentiality needs to be cared so that it can be manifested into its full-boom. Although, the potentialities has its own capacity to achieve its completion, but without care and guidance the same might be lost in the way. Swami Vivekananda defined education and gave its direction also by one line statement, as, "Education is the manifestation of the perfection already in man." By perfection he meant the potentialities within an individual. So, education system should provide the right type of environment needed for the flourishing of the potentialities within. As the required quantum of temperature, sunlight, humidity, etc. provide the right condition for the flourishing of the lotus bud into a full-bloom flower, so, the right environment is needed for the blooming of the human-bud (baby) into a complete human being. Providing these conditions to the learner is providing education to them. Now, these conditions of learning, differ depending upon the nature of the potentiality to be developed. The Delors Commission Report (1996) in its "Education for the 21st Century" emphasised on the development of human potentialities under four broad fields - as, learning to Know, learning to Do, learning to Live-together and learning to Be. Our present education system claims to follow these four

important fields within its varied components, e.g. – curriculum, quality of teacher, methodology, women education, mass education, etc. which are discussed below.

A. The Curriculum

At present our education system emphasises primarily only on the aspect of learning to ‘Know’ and to some extent on learning to ‘Do’. Hence, out of the three important domains of education, only the Cognitive and to some extent the Psychomotor domain are being cultivated. Practically there is no room for the learning to ‘Live-together’ and learning to ‘Be’ pillars in our ‘modern’ education curriculum. Therefore, the Affective domain, the important domain for the development of humanity qualities remain neglected! As a result, our generation are coming out of the schools, colleges, universities with filled-up knowledge/information in their brain but devoid of humanity! They are knowledge machines! Dr. Ambedkar rightly said, “*An educated person without value, morality is more dangerous than a beast*”. Our society is paying the prices for this, by every day’s rape, murder, forgery, riot, breaking of family structure, neglect to the elder generation, etc. all around!

Here are some remedies from Vivekananda’s view on education. According to him, “*Education is not the amount of information that we put into your brain and runs riot there, undigested, all your life. We must have life building, man making, character making assimilation of ideas. If you have assimilated five ideas and made them your life and character, you have more education than any man who has got by heart a whole library*”^[2]. So, our emphasis only on Cognitive domain, stores only some factual information, which the learner fail to perceive and to form clear conception. Thus, these unassimilated, scattered information many a times appears conflicting among them, which Swamiji termed as ‘riot’ in the mental domain. He further supported his view as, “*If education were identical with information the libraries to be the greatest edges in the world & encyclopaedias the rests*”^[3] Swamiji’s educational philosophy was a balance of all the three domains of education which he expressed in the sentence, “*We want that education by which character is formed, strength of mind is increasing, the intellect is expanded & by which one can stand on ones feet*”^[3]. Here, character formation emphasises cultivation of the Affective domain, ‘increasing the intellect’ focuses on the Cognitive domain and the last words of his statement pays importance to the development of psychomotor domain.

Swamiji was very much aware about the importance of believing in God, in one’s life. So, he expressed, “*Social reform is not possible without spiritual reform*”^[4]. Society is formed of individual human being. Hence, if these people are believing in ultimate authority, they will feel accountable to that authority and refrain from all evil deeds. His attitude will lead the society towards goodness, progress. The sense of spirituality will change the human behaviour to cultivate good things and to refrain from bad things. This is known as good human character. Hence, spirituality is the cause and good character is its result. Thus, Swamiji rightly put emphasis on developing spirituality through education system. Spirituality does not necessarily mean following any particular mode of God’s appreciation (worship/prayer). So, spirituality will not generate any conflict /enmity among different religious groups living side-by-side. In order to clarify this point Swami Vivekananda told, “*We must not only tolerate other religions, but positively embrace them,*

and that the truth is the basis of all religions”^[5]. By using the word embracing he probably meant respecting the common spirituality behind each religion. This will bring unity among different communities, and hence the pillar ‘Learning to live-together’ will be achieved. That aspect was very much to Swamiji reflected in his words, “*Religion is the innermost core of education. Religion is like the rice and everything else, is like the curries. Taking only curries causes indigestion and so is the case with taking rice alone*”^[3]. Hence, education curriculum must include religion as a living experience with the learners themselves. In other words, practical demonstration of one’s accountability needs to be provided through our education curriculum. And this is possible only through inculcating spirituality.

Inculcation of spirituality will automatically generate strong motive, dedication, sense of right and wrong, accountability, etc. elements of good character, as the bi-product of that spirituality. He has rightly mentioned, “*In building up character, in making for everything that is good and great, in bringing peace to others, and peace to one’s own self, religion is the highest motive power, and, therefore ought to be studied from that stand point*”^[6]. In short Swamiji defined the aim of education as, “*Character, efficiency and humanism should be the aim of all education*”^[7]. His educational Philosophy encompasses the three isms viz. Idealism, Naturalism and Pragmatism. Applicability aspect, i.e., knowing the self and educating self should be paid importance in our curriculum. In Swamiji’s words, “*If you have assimilated five ideas & make them your life & character, you have more education than anyman who has not got by heart library*”^[3]. So, our education curriculum should not only pay importance of gathering knowledge from different domains /fields but should also devise means for the practical application of those knowledge in one’s life.

B. Quality of Teacher

A teacher is one who teaches. Who can teach? – Answer to this question is – who is superior to those whom to teach. Now, this superiority should be in the light of the curriculum content discussed above in reference to Swami Vivekananda’s views. That is a teacher should be qualified in four pillars of education and three domains of child development, as discussed above.

But in reality we do find that passing the cognitive (or psychomotor) domain test is the ultimate criteria for getting appointment as ‘teacher’! As is the teacher, so the students – the society gets! This leads to all chaos today we are facing in the field of dilapidated humanity.

According to Swamiji, a teacher, in addition to qualifying in cognitive (or psychomotor) domain, must be dedicated. He used the term ‘*Tyagi*’ as the criteria for a good teacher^[8]. Unless one rises high, how he/she can shower others? So, a teacher has to rise high from the average human instincts – incompleteness in understanding, conceptual defects, selfishness, individual consumerist philosophy, biasness, lust, etc.

C. Methodology

Methodology of education should be child centred, life centred, activity oriented. But too much child centeredness should not be allowed to place the immature children in the position of guide and the teacher as follower. This will be equivalent to placing the cart before the horse!

Our present education system suffers from highly professionalism and corporate culture. This took 'life' away from the life-making education system! In the name of child-centeredness, teachers' role is dwarfed merely into a follower of the immature children! High institutionalization has killed the life-centred activity in our present education system.

Swami Vivekananda favoured Gurukul system as the method of teaching [8]. Where, the immature learner will be able to follow the real-life demonstration of his/her teacher. Hence, education will be real, life-oriented and activity based. In this method the learner will do most of the work while the teacher will be the facilitator. Regarding child-centeredness, Swamiji advocates for motivation and positive feedback to the learners. He said, "If young boys and girls are encouraged and are not unnecessarily criticized all the time, they are bound to improve in time" [9].

D. Women Education

Women are not only the half population of the nation but they are essential complementary part of it. Existence of human race can't be imagined without women. So, the quality of society /nation /world depends directly upon the quality of women there. So, there should not be two thought on the need of women education. As women are the mother, the care-giver, men-maker; the artist who mould the mud into desired idol of humanity; - their education (curriculum, etc.) should not be identical with that meant for the men. Affective domain should be emphasised here more.

Our present education system although puts importance on women education, but we are far behind in terms of quality and quantity. There is no difference in curriculum, methodology, etc. for the education meant for women.

According to Vivekananda, our women should be educated as to, "Make women strong, fear-less, and conscious of their chastity and dignity". But, in the race of blind copying the consumerist Western culture, even in the field of education, our 'educated' women in particular are more advanced in marketing their chastity and dignity! Everything is product today and hence marketable in the globalized market of capitalism. Hence, women body is no exception, instead it is highly demanding 'product' in pleasure seeking consumerist culture. In this critical situation, we must revert to Vivekananda, as he says, "The ideal women in India are the mother, the mother first, and the mother last. The word women calls up to the mind of the Hindu motherhood; the God is called mother [7]." It is notable that our women are highly respected and elevated to the position of Godly attributes. So, how can we make them marketable? – How can we sell our mothers and sisters? So, in nutshell, women education should be paid more importance and should be focussed in inculcating motherly attributes more and to make them aware about their real chastity and dignity.

E. Mass Education

As education converts each individual into a resource - useful to the society, known as human resource; so, more the human resources there, more the society will move towards progress. Uneducated persons are not useful to the society and hence a burden on others. No nation can excel in the nail-biting competition in this globalized world with a burden of uneducated masses. Poet Rabindranath Tagore rightly said, "They are pulling you back, whom you have pushed back." So, Education to All is essential for our survival.

But unfortunately our present position in terms of mass education is dim. We hold a shameful position in the global literacy list today. India stands at 177th position in the literacy list of 205 countries (as of 2012)! [10].

Swami Vivekananda strongly advocated for mass education. "So long as the millions live in hunger and ignorance, I hold every person a traitor who, having been educated at their expense, pays not the least heed to them. I consider that the great national sin is the neglect of the masses, and that is one of the causes of our downfall. No amount of politics would be of any avail until the masses of India are once more well-educated, well-fed and well-cared for.", said Swamiji [3].

Conclusion

In conclusion it can be said that Swami Vivekananda wanted such education where all misconceptions, confusions, ill-intent between and among the communities will find no place and total focus would be put on extracting the good potentialities from the human beings in order to provide the society the proper human resources for its all-round advancement. He rightly realized that segregation and division among the human society in the name of caste, sect, religion, occupation, etc. are the major stumbling blocks in real advancement. So, he clarified, "At first it is to be cleared that I do not belong to any group or community. To me every community is great. I love all of them and tried to extract the truth and goodness from among them – throughout my life. ... Those who have grasped the real meaning of religion do not quarrel with its different manifestations" [11]. He further added that "It is the blind Hindu followers who have made us to believe that the Muslims are foreigners. This very wrong perception has created barrier before the innocent Muslims in uniting with the Hindus [12]." Today, Hindu-Muslim division is being created in Indian society with the sole intent to get political dividend! Our education system is not only helpless onlooker but is custodian in the hands of such vested interested politicians! But it was the duty of education system to provide necessary education and training to the society in the line of Swamiji's views as mentioned above and as is reflected by his bold and far-sighted assertion that the future of India lies only on the philosophy of - "Islamic body and Vedantic Brain" [13].

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