

Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902)

Early Life: Vivekananda's original name was Narendranath Dutt. He acquired the new name in 1886 when he took 'Sanyasa'.

He was born in Calcutta in 1863. His father was a practicing lawyer at Calcutta High Court. Under the influence of his mother he made a deep study of Hindu scriptures. At college he was adept in boxing, riding, swimming and wrestling. He was an ardent student of philosophy and poetry. He graduated with honours from Calcutta University.

Education: He had an excellent command over Bengali, English and Sanskrit. He was a voracious reader and had a sharp memory. He could often display a verbatim familiarity with the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. His principal Rev. W.W. Hastie once remarked, "Narendranath is really a genius. I have travelled far and wide but I have never yet come across a lad of his talents and possibilities, even in German Universities, among philosophical students".

Meeting with Shri Ramakrishna—A Turning Point in Life

He was deeply interested in the study of philosophy and religion. For sometime he was a classroom teacher also. His search for truth led him to Ramakrishna Paramhansa, at Dakshineswar in 1882. Though not literate, Swami Ramakrishna was an enlightened soul. During the next six years of his association with the master, he had a spiritual transformation and emerged as Swami Vivekananda. He left home and travelled all over India. His wandering left him deeply affected by the despair and poverty of the masses of India.

Swami Vivekananda organised the Ramakrishna Mission in 1886, after the passing away of his master.

In 1888, 2 years after his master's death, he set out to the Himalayas. He wandered for 2 years through deserts and forests. In Kanyakumari, after worshipping in the temple, Vivekananda sat on a rock, and meditated for sometime. He went to America in 1893.

Soul-stirring Address at the World Parliament of Religions at Chicago (USA) in 1893: On September 11, 1893, on the opening day of the Parliament, he sat rapt in silent meditation. In the afternoon session he rose to speak. He bowed down to *Saraswati*, the Devi (goddess of learning) and

addressed the audience as "Sisters and brothers of America". Before he could utter another word, people were so much mesmerised that there was applause for full two minutes. When silence was restored, he began his address. His wisdom coupled with universal message of love and tolerance made him a world teacher. In his address, he said that upon the banner of every religion will soon be written, "HELP and not FIGHT", "ASSIMILATION and not DESTRUCTION", "HARMONY and PEACE and not DISSENSION". The Parliament of Religion lasted seventeen days and Swamiji addressed six times.

Message of Spirituality and Social Service: He addressed several meetings in the USA, UK, Sri Lanka and spread the spiritual message.

Swami Vivekananda devoted the rest of his strenuous life in communicating his message of unity and tolerance.

In India, he organised social work also in addition to spiritual pursuits.

Principal Features of Philosophy

1. God resides in every human heart.
2. The best worship of God is service to mankind.
3. Ethics and morality should be the real basis of life.
4. Love and renunciation should permeate the universe.
5. Religion means self-realisation through self-control.

Philosophy of Education

Following are the main elements of the philosophy of Swami Vivekananda:

1. All knowledge is in the human mind.
2. Education is the manifestation of the perfection already in man.
3. Knowledge is inherent in man. No knowledge comes from outside.
4. Like fire in a piece of flint, knowledge exists in the mind. Man discovers it.
5. The infinite library of the universe is in our mind.

Swami Vivekananda explains this as, "We say Newton discovered gravitation. The falling of an apple gave the suggestion to Newton and then he studied his own mind. He rearranged all the previous links of thought in his mind and discovered a link among them, which we call the law of gravitation".

Swami Vivekananda on Various Aspects of Education

(i) *Aim of Education:* Man-Making

(ii) *Role of the Teacher:* Vivekananda laid stress on the following qualities that a teacher should have:

1. The first condition is that he should be sinless.
2. The second condition is that he should know the spirit of scriptures.
3. The third condition is the spiritual force of the teacher should be based on love for the students.

4. The fourth condition is that the teacher should think that he is only helping the child to grow. He is the external teacher and he offers the suggestion which arouses the internal teacher, *i.e.*, the mind of the child.

(iii) *Principles of teaching-learning*: Swami Vivekananda emphasised the following:

1. *Self-teaching*—"No one was ever taught by another. Each of us has to teach himself. A child educates itself".
2. *Living Examples of Teacher*—"Words even thoughts, contribute only one-third of the influence in making an impression—the man two-thirds".
3. *Teaching through Positive Suggestions*—"We should give positive ideas. Negative ideas only weaken men. If you speak kind words to them and encourage them, they are bound to improve in time".
4. *Concentration as the only method of education*—"The power of concentration is the only key to the treasure-house of knowledge".
5. *Qualities of the Learner*: "The conditions necessary for the taught are purity, a real thirst after knowledge and perseverance".

(iv) *Physical and Health Education*: "Be strong, my young friends... you will be nearer to Heaven through football than through the study of Gita".

Education to be based on Western Science coupled with Vedanta: "Living with the Guru and a similar system of imparting education are needed. What we want is Western science coupled with *Vedanta—Brahmacharya* as the guiding motto and also *Shraddha* (faith) in one's own self".

(v) *Education of the Masses*: Vivekananda gave prime importance to the education of the masses. He asserted, "The chief cause of India's ruin has been the monopolising of the whole education of the land, by dint of pride and royal authority, among a handful of men". He further observed, "If we are to rise again, we shall have to do it in the same way, that is, by spreading education among the masses". He considers that "The great national sin is the neglect of the masses, and that is one of the chief causes of our downfall. No amount of politics would be of any avail until the masses in India are once more well-educated, well-fed, and cared for. They pay for our education, they build our temples, but in return they get kicks. They are practically our slaves, if we want to regenerate India, we must work for them".

(vi) *Women's Education*: Vivekananda was an ardent champion of the education of women. He remarked, "Women have many and grave problems but none that cannot be solved by that magic word: education!"

(vii) *Secular Education*: Vivekananda had great regard for all religions: "Let us take in all that has been in the past, enjoy the light of the present and open every window of the heart for all that will come in the future. Salutation to all the prophets of the past, to all the great ones of the present and to all that are to come in the future".

Contribution: Relevance of His Views Today

1. He laid stress on the character development education.
2. He advocated the education of the masses which implies adult education and free and compulsory education regardless of caste, creed or colour. He said, "I consider that the greatest national sin is the neglect of the masses".
3. He revived the spirit of humanism in education.
4. His clarion call to the educated people was, "So long as the millions live in hunger and ignorance, I hold every man a traitor who, having been educated at their expense, pays not the least heed to them".
5. He considered the education of women as the chief instrument of national regeneration.

Summing up. Educational needs of modern India are reflected in the Preamble to our Constitution. It is clear that educational aims, contents and methods of teaching and in fact the entire process of education must be based on these pillars—Secularism, Socialism and Democracy. From the educational philosophy of Swami Vivekananda, as stated above, it is clear that he visualised the needs of independent India and accordingly he set forth his philosophical thought. His views are quite relevant today. He was for a liberal approach to religion and accordingly advocated values of secularism. He believed that ignorance was the most important evil of the society. He advocated mass education, *i.e.*, free and compulsory education as well as adult education. His advocacy of women's education is in accordance with the present day needs. His stress on child-centred education is another remarkable aspect of his educational philosophy. He advocated a system of education that was egalitarian.

Swami Vivekananda's views on education may be summed up in his own words, "We want that education by which character is formed, strength of mind is increased, the intellect is expanded and by which one stands on one's own feet".

Man-Making Education: Concept

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Swami Vivekananda saw the 'Divine' in the form of the poor whom he called *Daridra Narayan*. This denotes the direction of 'Man-making' education. It implies that education should develop a spirit of service, and the poor and the needy must be helped to raise themselves.

Man-making education also brings out the significance of the famous words said by Vivekananda at the Parliament of Religions held in 1893 at Chicago. These were: HELP, ASSIMILATION, HARMONY and PEACE. Accordingly education should develop these qualities in man.

Man-making education is inherent in character development as well as vocational development. Man-making education is a very comprehensive concept.

Main Elements of Man-Making Education

Following are the chief elements of man-making concept for which education should be directed to:

1. Swami Vivekananda believed in the *Vedanata* philosophy which considers that the ultimate goal of human life is to attain 'Unity with the Creator'. An individual must fully understand this.
2. Service to man is equated with devotion to God. According to Swami Vivekananda, God resides in every human heart. Thus man should develop the spirit of service to his fellow beings.
3. Swami Vivekananda believed in the liberal concept of religion. Essential elements of all religions are the same. No religion is inferior to any other religion. Man should follow an attitude of respect for all religions.
4. According to Vivekananda, love is the highest goal of religion. Man should imbibe love for all and hatred for none.
5. Swami Vivekananda developed a synthesis between science and spirituality. Man should attain knowledge of science and spirituality.
6. Swami Vivekananda was a prophet of humanity. His concept of man transcends the cultural boundaries of the East and the West. He was a rationalist and a man must develop rational attitude in life.

Educational Implications of Man-Making Education

Meaning of Education: According to Swamiji, education is the manifestation of divinity already existing in man. Education is not the imparting of facts. "If education were identical with information, the libraries would be the greatest sages in the world and encyclopaedias the Rishis". He further observed, "Will you consider a man as educated if only he can pass some examinations and deliver good lectures?. The education which 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 a lion—is it worth the name?"

Aims of Education

(i) *Character Development:* Man-making Education implies that education which builds character. Swamiji states, "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 feet".

Vivekananda was a firm believer in education as an instrument of human betterment. He was greatly distressed to see the degradation in which the masses had fallen because of the denial of literacy and education to them. He was highly critical of the educational system itself with its Western bias and lack of attention to the development of the mental ability and moral character in its pupils. He wanted a thorough reorientation of the educational system. He declared, "We must have life-building, man-making, character-making

assimilation of ideas". He quoted an old Sanskrit saying "yatha kharaschandanaabharavahi bharasya yetta na tu chandanasya" which means "The ass carrying its load of sandalwood knows only the weight and not the value of the sandalwood". Vivekananda scoffed at the importance being given by the educational system to book-learning and memory training. "Education", he said, "is not the amount of information that is put in your brain and run-riots there, undigested all your life".

Vivekananda said, "If you really want to judge the character of man, look not at his great performances; watch a man do his most common actions. Those are indeed the things which will tell you the real character of the great man". 'Intellectuality' is not the highest good. 'Morality' and 'spirituality' are the things for which we strive'. "Our women are not so learned, but they are more pure". He does not consider a man as educated if he can only pass some examination and deliver good lectures. The basis of all system, social or political, rests upon the goodness of man. No nation is great or good because its Parliament enacts this or that, but because its men are great and good.

(ii) *Education for the Development of Spirit of Social Service in Man:* Swami Vivekananda's wide travels in India gave him first hand knowledge of the socio-economic conditions of the people of India. He was deeply moved at the utter poverty and backwardness of the masses. He observed, "So long as the millions live in hunger and ignorance, I hold every man a traitor who, having been educated at their expense, pays not the least heed to them ... I call him a *mahatma* who feels for the poor. Let these people be your God—think of them, work for them".

'Selflessness' is the essence of Indian philosophy and its main concern is '*Sarvajana Sukhino Bhavantu*' (happiness for all) and education's function is to serve this end. Man-making education must inculcate the spirit of selfless service.

(iii) *Mental Development of Man:* Swamiji laid stress on developing strong mind.

(iv) *Rational Development of Man:* Swamiji believed in the unity of all religions.

Curriculum Development and Man-Making

Curriculum should synthesise the knowledge and wisdom of the East and the West.

Swamiji also attached great importance to the physical development of the individual for which he wanted to include physical education as an integral part of the curriculum.

Methods of Instruction of Man-Making

Vivekananda observes, "You can supply the growing seed with the materials for the making up of its body, bringing to it the earth, the water,

the air that it wants. And there your work stops. It will take all that it wants by its own nature. So is with the education of the child. A child educates itself. The teacher spoils everything by thinking that he is teaching. Within man is all knowledge, and it requires only an awakening, and that much is the work of the teacher. We have to do only so much for the boys that they may learn to apply their intellect to the proper use of their hands, legs, ears, eyes, etc. and finally everything will become easy". He was against the uncritical acceptance of any form of knowledge. This implies that education must develop reasoning power.

Swami Vivekananda laid stress on the following elements of methods of instruction:

1. A child educates itself. We have to do only so much for the boys that they may learn to apply their intellect to the proper use of their hands, legs, ears, eyes, etc. and finally everything will become easy: "Like fire in a piece of flint, knowledge exists in the mind; suggestion is the friction which brings it out".
2. The mind works through various stages to attain its fuller development. First it lays hold of the concrete, and only gradually deals with abstractions.
3. The teaching must be modified according to the needs of the taught. The true teacher is one who can immediately come down to the level of the student and transfer his soul to the student's soul and see through and understand through his mind.
4. Positive suggestions encourage learning. Negative thoughts only weaken them.
5. Concentration is the best method and is the key to the treasure-house of knowledge. Vivekananda observed, "To me the very essence of education is the concentration of mind, not the collecting of facts". *Brahmacharya* is necessary for concentration.
6. The learner must have great power of endurance.
7. The learner must be able to control the internal and external senses. There must be a continuous struggle, a constant fight, an unremitting grappling with our lower nature, till the higher want is actually felt and victory is achieved.
8. The pupil's faith in himself will enable him to imbibe knowledge effectively.
9. Reverence for the *guru* should be inculcated in the pupil.
10. Learning and intellectual development can be fostered through frank and open discussion on all topics of study between the teacher and the taught.
11. Purity in thought, speech and act is absolutely necessary in the taught and also in the teacher.
12. Travel leads to broadening our horizon and enables us to share our knowledge with others.

Role of the Teacher in Man-Making

He says, "My idea of education is personal contact with the teacher *Gurugrihava*. Without the personal life of a teacher there would be no education. It is the personality of man that really impresses us and not merely his words. "Words, even thoughts contribute only one-third of the influence in making an impression, the man two-thirds. What you call the personal magnetism of the man—that is what goes out and impresses you". "It is the real man, the personality of the man, that runs through us".

Women's Education

Swami Vivekananda forcefully advocates that they should acquire the 'spirit of valour and heroism'. In the present day it has become necessary for them also to learn self-defence. Vivekananda states, "If you do not raise the women who are the living embodiment of the Divine Mother, don't think that you have any other way to rise". He stresses that "the country and the nation which do not respect the women have never become great, nor will ever be in future". He pleaded that *Brahmcharinis* of education and character should take up the task of teaching because through such devout preachers of character, there will be the real spread of female education in the country.

History, house-keeping, the arts, sewing, upbringing of children, the duties of home life and the principles that make for the development of character are to be taught to girls.

Education of the Masses

He considered it a great national sin, if the education of the masses was neglected. He observed, "No amount of politics would be of any avail until the masses in India are once more well-educated, well-fed, and well-cared for". "If we want to regenerate India, we must work for them". Vivekananda calls him a Mahatma 'who feels for the poor'. He stated, "Let these people be your God—think of them, pray for them incessantly, the Lord will show you the way". He advocated that education must reach every home.

Man-making Education and Vocational Education

Swami Vivekananda's man-making education also included vocational self-sufficiency of man. He said, "It would be better if the people got technical education so that they might find work and earn their livelihood".

Concept of True Religious Education and Religious Man

He laid stress on practising all the good points of all religions. He said, "Salutation to all the prophets of the past".

Man-making Education: Physical and Health Education

Vivekananda was not satisfied with an education that merely looked to the development of the mind. He was also greatly concerned about the proper

care of the body and the healthy development of one's physique. "Be strong, my young friends", he urged, "that is my advice to you. You will be nearer to heaven through football than through the 'Gita'. These are bold words, but I have to say them to you. I know where the shoe pinches. You will understand the Gita better, with your biceps, your muscles a little stronger. You will understand the mighty genius and the mighty strength of Krishna better with a little of strong blood in you". He emphasised repeatedly, "Strength is goodness. Weakness is sin".

Summing up: Contribution of Swami-Vivekananda in Man-Making: Vivekananda reminded that the nation lived in the cottages and therefore it was the duty of every educated young man to go from village to village and make the people understand their real condition, awake the village and make the people understand their real condition, awake them from their long slumber and advise them how to improve their own miserable lot. The sunken vitality of the helpless victims of social injustice was to be restored physically, intellectually as well as spiritually. Swami Vivekananda aimed at the removal of social injustice.

Man-making education must develop such individuals who are ethically sound, intellectually sharp, physically strong, religiously liberal, socially efficient, spiritually enlightened and vocationally self-sufficient.

Swami Vivekananda founded the Ramakrishna Mission which is engaged in the task of man-making through its multifarious activities. It has opened several educational institutions, libraries and reading rooms, hospitals and dispensaries. Hundreds of selfless workers of the Mission are working for the upliftment of masses.

Important Publications by and on Swami Vivekananda

1. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda – 9 volumes.*
2. *Bhaktiyoga.*
3. *Advaita Vedanta.*
4. *Education.*
5. *Jnana Yoga.*
6. *Lectures from Colombo to Almora.*
7. *Memories of European Travels.*
8. *Philosophical and Religious Lectures of Swami Vivekananda.*
9. *Swami Vivekananda at the Parliament of Religions.*