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Abstract

Swami Vivekananda's views of Education are briefly presented in this paper. Education does not mean a load of information that is inserted by force into the mind of a child. He was against the system of the contemporary educational system, which fans greed, turned men into slaves, capable of slavery and nothing else. In India divinity was the basic foundation of education based on the philosophy of Vedanta and Upanishads. Education needs to be life building, man-making, and character-making. The process of education is like growing a plant from a small seed. Care is needed during the developing stages. The role of parents and teachers is of greatest importance for the support and guidance. In this respect, Swami ji's ideas are extremely relevant and needed today. Vivekananda not only proposed high ideals of education but also suggested sound methods for achieving them. The purpose of teaching is to awaken the inner self. Once awakened, anyone will take care of themselves. Man-making education is the need of the day toward off the social customs. (Based on a paper submitted at the Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Gol park, Kolkata, 2016)

1. Introduction

A mother was taking a 6-year-old child home after a day's carefulness of attending the school, then the swimming lesson followed by music class and then private tutoring on mathematics. The child looks tired yet energetic. The mother too was tired after hours of waiting outside the sacred places of training but her appearance was worried. Perhaps she was worried due to her zest to make the child a star performer in the school with high marks in Maths and all, an Olympic level swimmer, a musician par excellence who will frequent the TV shows. The following conversation was overheard:

Mother: ... 'Tui kitchu parish na' (you are useless). Look at Shaym. He got two prizes yesterday for his class performances (*disappointed, Mother continues*) and how many you got? Just one!

Child: ... No Mother. You forgot. Shaym got three prizes including his homework prize too. (*Child continued*) ... but are you not happy with what I got?

That is how many of our children are being educated in the cities! Examples of such negatives and imposed pressures by parents are uncontrolled and obvious. So are the demands of teachers in the classroom who expects the child to come prepared with every lesson to be taught. Students are expected to memorize and reproduce thoroughly in the exams in order to get high marks.

While discussing with Sri Priya Nath Sinha Swami Vivekananda observed "*we want is the ending of that system which aims at educating our boys in the same manner as that of the man who thrashed his ass, being advised that it could thereby be turned into a horse.*" [1] However, till today we are continuing the same system that he spoke so strongly against.

We are still keep alive the educational policy attributed to Lord Macaulay's speech in 1835 - "*I have traveled across the length and breadth of India and I have not seen one person who is a beggar, who is a thief. Such wealth I have seen in this country, such high moral values, people of such calibre, that I do not think we would ever conquer this country, unless we break the very backbone of this nation, which is her spiritual and cultural heritage, and, therefore, I propose that we replace her old and ancient education system, her culture, for if the Indians think that all that is foreign and English is good and greater than their own, they will lose their dignity, their native self-culture and they will become what we want them, a truly dominated nation.*" [2]

Against this background we need to revisit Swami Vivekananda's ideas. describing his concept of education, he observed: "*Education is not the amount of information that is put into your brain and runs commotion 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. ... 'The ass carrying its load of sandalwood knows only the weight and not the value of the sandalwood.' If education is identical with information, the libraries are the greatest sages in the world, and encyclopedias, are the rishis.*" [3]

Isn't clear that his words are so true even today? Parents and teachers are pouring information which the students are made to stuff in order to pass exams. Schools and colleges are running

like production-lines of modern factories, grading the products with marks and class! This is certainly not the education system that Swamiji envisioned.

Against this background in this paper will attempt to:

- (a) Present the concept and philosophy of education expressed by Swami Vivekananda
- (b) Discuss his ideas, suggestion and their current relevance
- (c) Identify some directions for further investigation.

2. Education and Swami Vivekananda's Philosophy

Defining education

The word "Education" is said to have been taken from the Latin term "Educatum", which means the act of teaching or training. Another view is that it has come from the Latin word "Educare" which means "to bring up" or "to raise".

It is also observed that the word "Education" has originated from another Latin term "Educere" which means "to lead forth" or "to come out". All these meanings indicate that education seeks to nourish the good qualities in man and draw out the best in every individual. Education seeks to develop the innate inner capacities of man.

In contemporary view, by educating an individual we attempt to provide a person with some desirable knowledge, understanding, skills, interests, attitudes, and critical 'thinking'. We consider that the purpose of education is only to acquire knowledge (of history, geography, arithmetic, languages, sciences, art, music literature, and such others) and skills in various fields of pursuits, and proof of the attainment is obtaining a degree. The contemporary view of education defined in the dictionary produces the following pattern of related thesaurus terms (Figure 1). However, this does not convey the equivalent but the broader meaning of the word '*shiksha*' in Sanskrit implies.

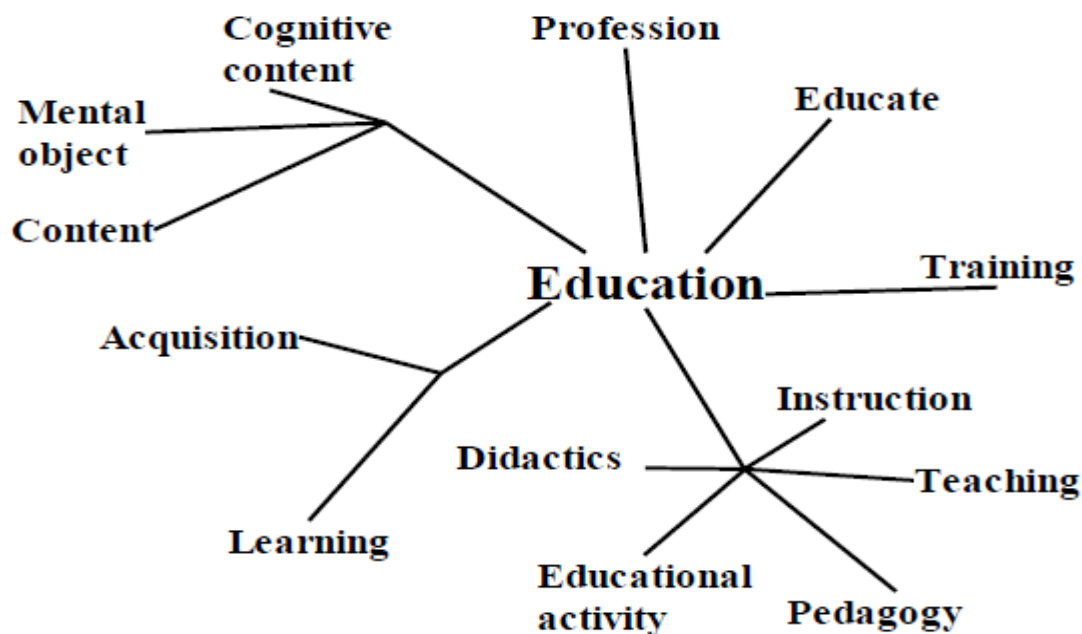


Figure 1: Dictionary terms related to ‘education’ as obtained by visual thesaurus.
com[4]

Education is more than literacy

Figure 1 shows an interesting pattern and conveys the concept of literacy that is attempted by education today. However, we must appreciate the difference between literacy and education. This is obvious from Swamiji’s statement: *“The man at whose feet I sat all my life — and it is only a few ideas of his that try to teach — could [hardly] write his name at all. All my life I have not seen another man like that, and I have travelled all over the world. When I think of that man, I feel like a fool, because I want to read books and he never did. That is why he was his own book. All my life I am repeating what Jack said and John said, and never say anything myself.”* [5]

Education involves more traits than literacy. Literacy is intellectual education, which is needed but it alone cannot make a person ‘educated’. Swamiji observed that intellectual education take no care of heart. *“It only makes men ten times more selfish, and that will be your destruction.”* [6] converting literacy with education Swamiji further elaborated *“Education is not filling the mind with a lot of facts. Perfecting the instrument and getting complete mastery of my own mind [is the ideal of education].”* [7]

So, *“What is education? Is it book-learning? No. Is it diverse knowledge? Not even that. The training by which the current and expression of will are brought under control and become fruitful is called education.”* [8] That is ‘shiksha’.

In this context, it would be worth remembering the story of an illiterate boatman and the highly learned Pundit narrated by Sri Ramakrishna in 'Kathamrita'. The boatman did not know the Vedas, Purans, and other scriptures but knew his job well and the essentials required for his work environment i.e. swimming. So, when the boat flipped over the boatman was saved but not the Pundit with loads of knowledge.

Goal of education

Although Swami Vivekananda did not write a book on education, he contributed valuable thoughts on the subject that are relevant and applicable even today. To him education plays a major role in curing the evils in society, and it is critical in shaping the future of humanity.

Like a scientist Swami Vivekananda set the system goal first. Drawing the inspiration from his master who said in simple words 'the goal of human being is to achieve God', Swamiji pronounced the system goal "*Education is the .mark of the perfection already in man*". [9]

This statement is very well elaborated in many books by various illustrious authors. [10] [11]

He used the term 'man-making education' to simply convey the .highest idea. "*The ideal of all education, all training, should be this man-making. But, instead of that, we are always trying to polish up the outside. What use in polishing up the outside when there is no inside? The end and aim of all training is to make the man grow. The man who influences, who throws his magic, as it were, upon his fellow-beings, is a dynamo of power, and when that man is ready, he can do anything and everything he likes; that personality put upon anything will make it work.*" [12]

A self-aware person would feel the unity with all life in the universe as different manifestations of the same self. This essential unity of the entire universe is the goal to be realized through education. Hence, the purpose of 'man-making' is for rousing human awareness of his true self.

It may be noted here that many may call it 'spiritual education'. However, it is possible that the word 'spiritual' could wrongly be associated with religion by some people and they may feel .prejudiced against it. Hence, Swamiji most appropriately coined the term 'man-making education' whose goal has been stated in the above quote.

3. Process of education

Swami Vivekananda's Complete Works is evidence of his deep thoughts on education. The sweep, range, and depth of topics covered in his lectures and writings will leave one breathless. His views on education and its methods deal with physical education, moral and religious education, medium of education, women education and education for weaker

sections of society and many other. A useful compilation of the topics covered would be found in the works of Avinashilingam [9] and Dr. Kiran Walia [10] (See Figure 2).

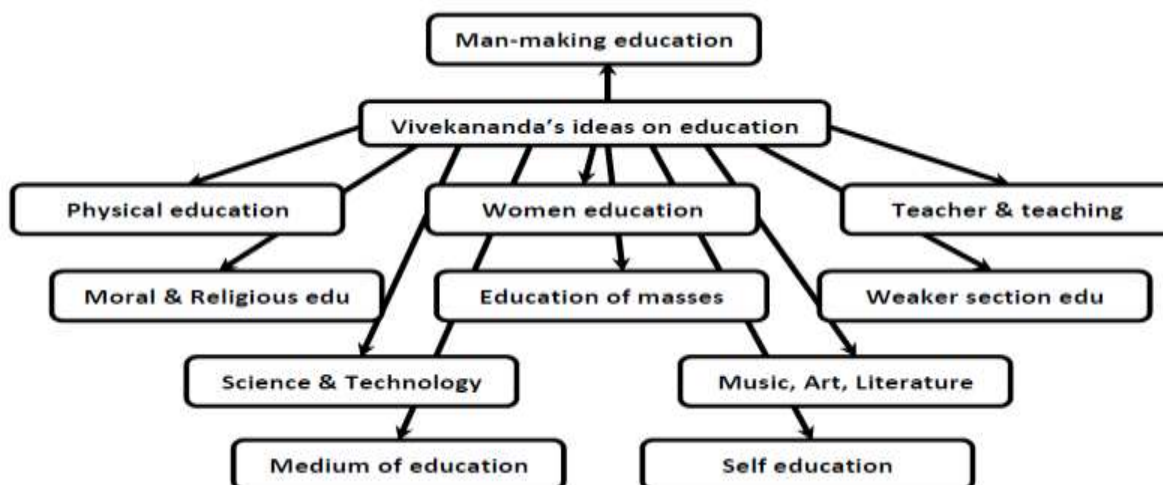


Figure 2: Some of the key education-related issues as found in the Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda

A goal is reached through sub-goals or stages with proper support. To express the process of education Swamiji used the analogy of growing a plant from a tiny seed. *“You cannot make a plant grow in soil unsuited to it. A child teaches itself. But you can help it to go forward in its own way. What you can do is not of the positive nature, but of the negative. You can take away the obstacles, but knowledge comes out of its own nature. Loosen the soil a little, so that it may come out easily. Put a hedge round it; see that it is not killed by anything, and there your work stops. You cannot do anything else. The rest is a manifestation from within its own nature.”* [11]

Thus, education signified supporting the child through boyhood to youth. This essentially is the role of parents, teachers, society, and books. ‘Man making’ is a means of harmonious development of the body, mind, and soul. This can be achieved by concentration. *“To me the very essence of education is concentration of mind, not the collecting of facts. If I had to do my education over again and had any voice in the matter, I would not study facts at all. I would develop the power of concentration and detachment, and then with a perfect instrument I could collect facts at will.”* [12]

The teacher and parents are only to guide, suggest, point out and help the student. Their role is to motivate and encourage the students to explore the hidden treasure that is dormant within them. According to the Vedas, a balanced acquisition of ‘*Para*’ and ‘*Apara*’ ‘*Vidya*’ is necessary for this purpose. However, the current education system is concerned with ‘*Apara Vidya*’ alone.

4. Implementation strategy: education of Women and Teachers

Theories and ideas are good but their utility is proved through successful achievements. For this reason, Swamiji's ideas on education included strategies too. At the outset, he made the distinction between teaching and learning in educating a child. He observed, "*a child educates itself. You come to hear me, and when you go home, compare what you have learnt, and you will find you have thought out the same thing; I have only given it expression. I can never teach you anything: you will have to teach yourself, but I can help you perhaps in giving expression to that thought.*" [13](emphasis added). This is constructivist learning in the current parlance.

To drive his point home, he refers to the growth of a plant. Just as in the case of a plant, one cannot do anything more than supplying it with water, air, and manure while it grows from within its own nature, so is the case with a human child. A child is like a seed, a sapling, which is to be grown by the parents and teachers who are the immediate gardeners. The parents are the teachers at home. Their roles are of utmost importance to fence developments through the initial stages.

Thus, Swamiji laid a lot of emphasis on the environment at home and school for the proper growth of the child. The parents, as well as the teachers, should inspire the child by the way they live their lives. In his words: "*Thus Vedanta says that within man is all knowledge even in a boy it is so and it requires only an awakening and that much is the work of a teacher.*"

"*Mere begetting children does not make a father; a great many responsibilities have to be taken upon one's shoulders as well.*" [14] Therefore, parents' particularly, women's education is necessary to implement Swamiji's ideas. If women get the right type of education, then they will be able to educate a child properly. As an example, he referred to his own mother from whom he learned the Ramayana, Mahabharata, English, and such other useful lessons in early life.

"*The external teacher offers only the suggestion which rouses the internal teacher to work to understand things. Then things will be made clearer to us by our own power of perception and thought, and we shall realise them in our own souls, and that realisation will grow into the intense power of will. First, it is feeling, then it becomes willing, and out of that willing comes the tremendous force for work that will go through every vein and nerve and muscle, until the whole mass of your body is changed into an instrument of the unselfish Yoga of work, and the desired result of perfect self-abnegation and utter unselfishness is duly attained.*" [15]

5. Discussion on Swamiji's ideas, suggestions, and their current relevance

Swami Vivekananda once scolded the west about their dollar-seeking culture. However, the same virus now transpired in the culture of the youth in India due to globalization, the Internet, and TV. The three C's (Credit card, Car, and Cash) are engulfing the youth. The lure of 3Cs is so strong that cheating and malpractices, starting from the examinations and later in business or profession have become an accepted fact of life. Acquiring a degree has become a sort of primary objective in the universities and colleges; learning has been relegated to secondary. Amidst the chaos and mad rush, some even lose balance and commit suicide.

"Education, in the modern context, has come to be dominated by evaluation." [16] Students, and so are parents are obsessed with exams and marks. Grades and degrees have become the measures of learning and education. Students are made to breathe marks, scores, competition, and prizes from early life, as is the case of the child mentioned earlier, smashing their innocence and sowing the seed of competition.

No wonder, when they grow up they get caught in the 3C framework of society. The money-oriented competitive culture filter to service or business professionals and politicians. Corruption and cheating have become an acceptable part of society so much so that the word 'bribe' has been replaced by 'convenience fee' and has been an accepted fact. Cheating, defrauding huge sums from poor people and from the national exchequer is reported daily. These are the proofs of the failure of the current 'education' system.

This can be changed if we pay heed to Swamiji's ideas of holistic education. It is in the transformation through 'man-making' education that we can find solutions for all social evils. The motto suggested by Swami Vivekananda is "**Be and Make**". No doubt, why the eternal idea is resounded in the Unesco's Delors commission report '**Learning: the treasures within**'. [17]

Thus, Swami Vivekananda's ideas on Education are still and more relevant today. The Ramakrishna-Vivekananda movement, oriented towards the goal of 'man-making education' can bring in the transformation with sustained effort through generations.

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