

## VISION OF SVAMI VIVEKANANDA ON WOMEN EDUCATION

**Dr. K. Krishnadas**

'There is no chance of the welfare of the world unless the condition of women is improved. It is not possible for a bird to fly on one wing.' - Svāmi Vivekānanda.

Svāmi Vivekānanda (1863 - 1902), a great thinker and reformer of India, embraces education, which for him signifies 'man-making', as the very mission of his life. In this paper, which purports to expound and analyze the views of Vivekānanda on women education, an endeavor has been made to focus on the basic theme of his philosophy

Svāmi Vivekānanda stand as the most effective spokesman and representative of this phase of India's cultural movement. He appeared on the scene where India was at the crossroads two distinct ideas, viz. on the one hand large section of English educated classes, dazzled by the splendor, power and progress of the European countries rushed head long to imbibe and initiate the European culture, beliefs and traditions in which they found a panacea for their sufferings. Vivekānanda's mission was to reconstruct and regenerate the nation.

The awakening of India resulting in the reconstruction of the nation in socio-political and cultural fields was the result of historical forces unleashed by colonialism. The emergence of a new middle class also created the atmosphere for the introduction and growth of English education which proved to be an important factor leading to the Indian awakening.

The purpose of the introduction of English education was of course to meet the imperialist needs rather than popular needs is clear from the minutes of Macaulay, the Law member of the Viceroy's council. He recorded 'We must at present do our best to form a class of persons Indian in blood and colour, but English in tastes, in opinion, in morality and intellect. This leads to the foundation of the Hindu college in 1817, which was a land mark in the history of the growth of English education in India. This is the most important steps towards the formation of an educated middle class and intelligentsia in the western sense of the time, who played a leading role in the minutes related to regeneration. In fact the policy of English education and establishment of universities in the three residency cities of Calcutta, Bombay and Madras in 1857, resulted in the class of English educated elite imbued with western liberalism, who acted as catalyst in bringing about the much needed reform in Indian society and religion.

The Indian society itself was caught in a vicious web created by superstitions. The social conditions were depressing. The most depressing was the position of women. The birth of a girl child was unwelcome, her marriage a burden and her widowhood inauspicious. Hindu society was characterized by the prevalence of such evils like female infanticide, child marriage and sati.

According to Svāmi Vivekānanda, future India would be the pride home not only of the richer sections but also the peasants, the fisherman, the cobbler and the sweeper. Vivekananda went over the length and breadth of India as a 'parivrājaka' or wandering monk. During his travel not only he met the princes in their palaces but also beggars in their huts. His travel was a great educational experience to him, since it enabled him to study the people of India, their customs, their sufferings etc. An important discovery of Vivekānanda was that in spite of diversities, there was a spirit of unity underlying in Indian culture, which the foreign rule was trying to undermine. During his 'parikramam' or tour of the country, Vivekānanda diagnosed the root cause of the ailments from which India was suffering. A humanist to the bottom of his heart, He attributed the most important

reason for India's degradation was the neglect of the masses. He considered the neglect of the masses as a 'national sin'

Another factor which Vivekānanda ascribed to the fall of the nation was the 'monopolizing of the whole education and intelligence of the land, by the dint of pride and royal authority, among the the whole education and intelligence of the land, by the dint of pride and royal authority, among the hand full of men'. Education had been deprived to the common man especially to women. Lack of education made the Indian masses illiterate and diffident.

Woman in India remained a depressed and backward section in society for several centuries. Ill treatment of women was one of the greatest sins of India. Women in ancient India occupied a prominent place in the intellectual field, but later they were neglected to an inferior position by denying them equal rights with men in education and knowledge of scriptures. He believed that for the development of India, the situation of woman in India should change. He believed that no country or nation that does not respect its women can become great. In his opinion, there is no hope of rise for that family or country where' there is no estimation of women, where they live in sadness'

Svāmi Vivekānanda linked the degradation of Indian society with the denial of education to the masses and he believed that education was the panacea for the ills of the society like poverty and illiteracy. But Vivekānanda was alive to the fact that poverty was a great hindrance to the path of education. The poor boys preferred to go to the field of work with their parents instead of going schools. Because extreme poverty they were compelled to earn their bread themselves. If the poor boys could not come to school, education must go to their huts. He observed that 'now if the mountain does not come to Mohammed, Mohammed must go to the mountain' If the poor boy cannot come to education, education must go to him. According to him the 'parivrājaka sanyāsins'(wandering monks) should go to the huts not only for preaching but also for teaching secular matters.

The Indian women of the nineteenth century led cloistered exis-

tence, subsisting on whatever her husband provided and having almost no freedom of expression and action. The age old repressive social system like child marriage, dowry system , the taboo against widow marriage , un fair property in heritance laws etc. had worsened the lot of woman- folk in this land. He did not consider the condition of women as an isolated social issue, instead it was intimately, connected the well being of the society as a whole. He was against the all distinctive between individuals based on gender were, from the point of view, untenable.

According to him 'there is no chance for the welfare of the world unless the condition of woman is improved. It is not possible for a bird to fly on only one wing'. What he pointed was that as a bird with only one wing cannot fly similarly a nation with her women in shackles could not make no progress. Liberty is the first condition of growth. Thus the liberations and education of women in Vivekānanda's view was most crucial for national development. To swāmi Vivekānanda the prevailing system of education was defective, The education system existed in India at that time was bookish and not practical. According to him that education should be for life as opposed to education for a profession. To him the aim of education should be to make man competent to solve the problem of life. Education should be a training of the mind, it is the life building, man making, character making, and assimilation of ideas- manifestation of the perfection already in man. He had suggested a kind of education which would make women proficient in managing their homes, since they had a greater role to play in the family. His concept of female education was based on his firm conviction that a great nation is born out of great man and 'it is only in the homes of educated and pious mothers that great men are born'.

Vivekānanda strongly reasoned the cause of such degradation of Indian women 'The principal reason why our race has so degenerated is that we had no respect for these living images of Śakti. Manu says, 'Where women are respected, there the Gods delight, and where they are not, there all work and efforts come to naught.' There is no hope of rise for that family or country where they live in miseries.

Sadvidya

According to Vivekānanda the Indian women should learn the art of self defense. Svāmiji was the first Indian reformer to suggest that the art of self defense should be included in the curriculum for women education. What he said more than one hundred year ago is relevant even for the present day. Moreover, Gandhiji's concept of women education had been greatly influenced by Vivekānanda's ideal of female education. His famous statement that 'educate a man, you are educating an individual, educate a women, you are educating the whole family' was nothing but an extended version of Svāmi Vivekānanda's concept of women education.

\*\*\*\*\*