

**RUSSELL AND VIVEKANANDA ON THE ROLE OF EDUCATION IN
SOCIAL RECONSTRUCTION**
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In every society the function of education is to realize the ideals of manhood. This realization is possible only in human society. No society is static. It is in a state of change and hence reconstruction is necessary. It is only because of a great disparity between the ideal and the factual, between the unrealized potential and the realized situation, there arise a conflict and crisis in society. In such a crisis situation the society badly needs a way out of a solution to that crisis. The role of education then is very urgent in this situation.

The function of education is inevitable for giving direction to this social reconstruction that we need desperately to solve our social problems and realize our ideals. Education helps to make us strong enough to look after ourselves in any given situation. It keeps us aware of our given surrounding as well as the rules and regulations of the society we are living in. It's only through knowledge that we can be able to question authority for its negligence or discrepancies. It is only then that we can avail our rights as a citizen and seek improvement in the structural functioning of governance and economy. Education helps us to understand ourselves better, it helps us to realize our potential qualities as a human being. It helps us to tap into latent talent, so that we may be able to sharpen our skills. In this paper I want to explain the role of education for changing ourselves and at the same time our society also. In this respect a special reference of Vivekananda and Bertrand Russell's views on education is discussed here.

Russell's view on education:

The greatest task of education is to reform the human mind. It is the key to the new world. It is the unfolding the divine nature in man. In the same tone Vivekananda also says that education is the manifestation of perfection already in man. Education is misnomer unless it trains the will of man. It aims at the reformation of attitudes of each and every individual in our society.

Russell also believed that right education can play an enormous role in developing the right type of individuals. The right outlook of the individual will help to reconstruct the society in which they live. According to Russell man is the Centre

point of everything. The development of good society depends upon the good individuals.

Russell is not agreed with Rousseau's view of education. The view of Rousseau is that children are born good, but society spoil them. But according to Russell children are at birth neither good nor bad. After educating them they may either be good or bad. In Christian view of education, children are born sinners and that the school have the duty to purify them. But Russell does not agree with such a view. According to him, either healthy or harmful characters may be formed with the help of education. Moreover he says that, man is driven by both positive and negative instincts. Positive instincts are called constructive e.g. play, love, co-operation, sympathy and negative instincts are called destructive instincts e.g. fight, jealousy, rage, competition, etc. The role of education is to cultivate the positive instincts and connects the negative instincts to positive outlet like sports, discovery and adventure to construct the positive attitude of life.

The above nature of education turns a man polite and gentle. It widens their scope and he becomes a helpful citizen of the universe. His kindness will be extended to the whole world. According to Russell, these qualities are helpful to form the ideal character of an educated person.

Individual freedom and education:

Education should aim at creating intelligent and free individuals. Nothing will be imposed upon them. The good of the individual should not be ignored. And natural growth of man is required for the good society. "Men, like trees, require for their growth and right soil and a sufficient freedom from oppression"¹. Students should provide wide scope to express their inner-quality which will help them to fit themselves in the external world. That is why Russell says, education should be pupil-centred, individually oriented. Students should be treated as ends in themselves and not as means to some national or religious ends. Hence, the present educational system is not matched with Russell's view of education.

The aim of education is the growth of individuality. "The object of education ought not to make all men alike but rather to see that each person attains the fullest

¹ Russell Bertrand, *Why Men Fight*, Indian Edition, 2010. P- 12.

expression of his personality”². The teacher should treat each pupil as an end in himself with his own rights and his own personalities. Reverence for the human personality is the beginning of wisdom in every social question but above all in education. So, each and every pupil’s individuality should not be suppressed but as far as possible it should be encouraged to develop.

The education helps us to make us creative and inventive. In the light of education man began to think freely and not only to believe what is being told. Everything will be accepted after experimentation. The scientific temperament makes people inquisitive and more educative. Now people should not be concealed by blind faith. He wants to accept anything after verification. It is the positive result of education.

Religion and Education:

The discovery of new knowledge acts as a weapon in the reformation and reconstruction of society. It was the cause of the decay of the dogmatic religion. Religion, according to Russell, snatches the power of the individual so that they cannot think or act freely. “The mediaeval theory of life broke down through its failure to satisfy men’s demands for justice and liberty.”³ Man’s religion will not be determined by authority, but must be the free choice of the each individual. A man must be free to choose his religion.

Any external influence on religion is discarded by Russell. He finds some inadequacies in religion. So, he is not in favour of traditional religion which is governed by authority. His objections against religion are as follows:

1. Religious beliefs are put forth dogmatically.
2. Religious teaching involves superstitious belief.
3. An orthodox person cannot tolerate the opinion of others.
4. In commenting on Gospel Russell says that he did not find even one word in the praise of intelligence. So, Religion praises virtue but not intelligent at all. All intelligent people are agnostic. Religious people cannot tolerate agnosticism.

² Russell Bertrand, *Education and Social Order*, 1932. P-42

³ Russell Bertrand, *Why Men Fight*, Indian Edition, 2010. P-13

Due to these inadequacies Russell put the above charges against religion and finally says that education can prosper only when it is freed from any influence.

International outlook and Education:

The proper function of education is to lead a good life. That is why it is essentially constructive and requires some positive conception of a good life. Russell wants education to be international in character from the political point of view. According to Russell patriotism should not be taught in the school because it makes us feel that mutual hatred and mutual murdering are our sacred duties.⁴ The aim of education is not to increase conflict and hatred but to spread and cultivate the international awareness. The people should be educated to remove the wickedness, ignorance and folly from the world. If man wants to survive in the world they should fighting against chaos from without and darkness from within. The truly human activity will be international in character and it should be the scheme of education.

Vivekananda's educational philosophy:

According to Vivekananda the aim of education is man- making. He prepares the scheme of this man-making education in the light of his philosophy of Vedanta. According to Vedanta, the essence of man lies in his soul, which he possesses in addition to his body and mind. Through this philosophy, he defines education as 'the manifestation of the perfection already in man.' The aim of education is to manifest in our lives the perfection, which is the very nature of our inner self. He thus realizes his immortal divine self, which is of the nature of infinite existence, infinite knowledge and infinite bliss.

Hence education, in Vivekananda's Philosophy, enables one to comprehend one's self within as the self everywhere. The essential unity of the entire universe is realized through education. So, man making for him stands for rousing mans to the awareness of his true self. However, education is not only the development of the soul in isolation from body and mind rather man making for him means a harmonious development of the body, mind and soul. Therefore, in the scheme of educational Philosophy, Vivekananda insist on physical health because a sound mind resides in a sound body.

⁴ Russell Bertrand, *Fact and Fiction*, Indian Edition, 2010. P-63

Education and social reconstruction:

Vivekananda's View of Education is mainly a man- making education. His aim is to unite all section of the society. So he wants a new system of education on the strength of the Vedantic ideal. In the latter half of the 19th century Indian society was facing a very great cultural crisis. Vivekananda realized that there was an urgent need to spread education throughout the country for uniting and reconstructing the scattered races and wanted them to think of India as a whole. He uses education as a weapon for that purpose. He taught the people of India that they should have faith in themselves. He not only stood for spiritual freedom but also wanted the external freedom of man. Besides talking about political freedom and social justice, he talked about the concept of strength and fearlessness. He justified his theory of fearlessness on the ground of philosophic Vedantism. He firmly believed this strength must come to the nation through education.

Education plays an important role to mend the nature of man. So, education is not only the information that is put into the brain. It is a creative activity of man. We must have life building, man-making, character making education in our life. Vivekananda suggests that education should give proper emphasis on creativity, originality and excellence. To him the aim of education is to unveil the divinity in man. Real education means to cultivate the sense of humility. This sense of humility is the basis of man's character, the true mark of a balanced personality.

Education and Religion:

Vivekananda takes religion as the innermost core of education. However, by religion, he does not mean any particular kind of it but its essential character, which is the realization of the divinity already in man. He also advocated that religion does not consist in dogmas or creeds or any set of rituals. A true religious man for him who leads a life in such a way that he manifest his higher nature, truth, goodness and beauty, in his thoughts, words and deeds. All impulses, thoughts and actions which lead one towards this goal are naturally ennobling and harmonizing, and are ethical and moral in the truest sense. It is in this context the idea of religion, as the basis of education should be understood.

Vivekananda believes that education with its religious core can invigorate man's faith in his divine nature and the infinite potentialities of the human soul. It

helps man to become strong, yet tolerant and sympathetic. It will also help man to extend his love and good will for others. According to Vivekananda the basic aim of education is to establish universal brotherhood of man through mutual love and respect. Unity in variety is the plan of the universe and religion alone can lead mankind to that unity. Education in the right line will lead man to the true sense of religion and help him to acquire knowledge about the perishable nature of human body and the eternity of the soul in it. That is why Vivekananda relates education with religion. He suggests the techniques of self-religion through 'Raja –Yoga' for concentration and meditation because for him the very essence of education is concentration of mind, not the collecting of facts.

Yoga and Education

Education is the learning process which requires the deep concentration of mind. The more the power of concentration, the greater the knowledge is acquired. According to Vivekananda the science of *yoga* helps us to strengthen our power of concentration. From the lowest man to the highest *yogi*, all have to use the same method to attain knowledge. It is the great practical things and the secret of all education.

The practice of *yoga* requires a high degree of concentration. When a man tries to concentrate on a particular object then thousands of undesired impulses may rush into the brain and disturb the mind. Hence to check the impulses and control the mind *Rajayoga* is the most perfect way. Vivekananda says that this *yoga* will help the student to develop his inner qualities like fearlessness, love, sympathy etc., and equip him to lead an ideal life.

Universal religion:

The practice of *yoga* makes a man holy or a saint. These holy men sustain the world by their conduct. That is why Gandhi says that politics must be spiritualized. Saints are the path finder of the society. They are of three categories. Meditative saints are those who ponder in isolation over the infinite and seek their own personal salvation. Devotee saints are in love with god and they bother neither about their own salvation nor about that of the society. But there is a third variety of saint who preaches religion and strives for the salvation of the society. Vivekananda is one of those missionary saints of India.

He believes in the unity of religion and hence advocated the ideal of a universal religion. His outlook was rational. He believed not only in reason but also in the freedom of thought, expression and action. He remarks that the same method of investigation which we apply to science and knowledge outside should be applied to the science of religion. Vivekananda realized that due to misunderstanding among different religions more blood is shed in the name of religion in human history. That is why; there is greater need of religious tolerance or the integration of all religions. The integration of all religions is possible only when we realize the true sense of religion i.e., oneness of all religions. Vivekananda took this idea from his master sage Ramakrishna. According to his master, to realize the infinite or God is the mission of human life. The many names of God and infinite forms of religion are the different paths to lead us to know the supreme reality.

The basis of universal religion is not conversion to one faith or creed, but the acceptance of every religion as the path to the same Truth, as every religion as a true path for self-realization, can alone be the basis of universal religion. According to him, truth is one. It can be expressed in a hundred thousand ways, and each of these ways is true. Hence we formulate a harmonious religious creed to make all religions come together in love. Religion is realization, not talk, not doctrine, nor theory. Professor R.D. Ranade also believes in this idea of religion being self-realization. This is the ideal of universal religion preached by Vivekananda. He practiced this universal religion throughout his life.

Education and international understanding:

Vivekananda wanted the gradual and peaceful changes through good system of education and by enlightening the people. He always insisted on the absolute conquest of fear. Being a spiritual monist he was essentially an internationalist. The creed of nationalism was not narrow and fanatical but was only a necessary stage in the social and political evolution of man. If man is guided by the divine, if he perform his duties with a total sense of detachment then nationalism will not be an obstacle towards internationalism. The self-expansion is possible only when a man renounce actions even after his realization of supreme knowledge. A man's duty is to do good for others. He preached the principle of Gita that only duty is the concern and not the

fruit. Finally the ultimate aim should be to establish international peace and security by strengthening the spiritual foundations of different nations.

Conclusion:

According to Russell, education should be pupil-centred, i.e., individually oriented. Hence, the educational process is a means to an end, and not an end in itself. The students should be treated as an end in themselves and not as means to some national or religious ends. Education should aim for the happiness of each student. Children should acquire knowledge for material gain as well as knowledge for intellectual pleasure. Education should have both utility and humanity as components. Education must not be a way of controlling children for specific purposes. Rather, it must encourage the children's natural inquisitiveness and help them to solve problems and gain happiness on their own initiative. So, through the education each person attains the fullest expression of his personality, which is conducive to the reconstruction of society.

On the other hand Vivekananda believes that by uniting *karma* with religion he could enlighten the people to think of religion in the right way. He reconciled life and religion. Religion signified to him the eternal principles of life and death and of spiritual progress. True education means training of the soul and it requires a master. It is not only worked out by reading of books. That is why he relates education with religion.

Religion helps people for his spiritual development. It is a misinterpretation of Vivekananda's philosophy of education to think that he has overemphasized the role of spiritual development to the utter negligence of the material side. Vivekananda, in his plan for the regeneration of India, repeatedly presses the need for the eradication of poverty, unemployment and ignorance. He says, We need technical education and all else which may develop industries, so that men, instead of seeking for service, may earn enough to provide for them-selves, and save something against a rainy day. He feels it necessary that it is not wrong to take from the Western nation all that is good in their civilization. However, just like a person, every nation has its own individuality, which must not be deformed. The individuality of India lies in her spiritual culture. Hence in Vivekananda's view, for the development of our nation, we have to combine the scientific attitude of the West with the spirituality of our country.

True education should equip the youth to contribute to the material progress of the country as well as to maintaining the supreme worth of India's spiritual heritage.

Lastly, we can conclude that both the thinkers are common in certain aspects of educational thought. They believe that education is the best means to reconstruct our society because it can reform the human mind. In Russell's words we can say that education is a key to the new world. It has an international and universal outlook.

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