

## PART - III

### CHAPTER – 8

#### **SWAMI VIVEKANANDA : THEORY OF EDUCATION AS HUMANITARIAN IDEAL**

Vivekananda gave serious thought to problems of education at a time when India, more or less, had lost its national character in education. The British established schools and colleges in India with the object of strengthening their hold over the country, of laying from the foundation of their power, of consolidating their dominion so that the risks to which a foreign ruler is always exposed may be reduced to minimum. The inevitable effect of British system of education was the creation of an ever increasing number of people who knew no art or trade and were compelled to serve the administration as clerics or lawyers. This crisis of national character and spirit due to the education system under the foreign domination frustrated and aggrieved Vivekananda. He had no respect for school education in British India. This great son of India wanted a system of education not for producing useless degree-holders, but for something in the line of positive teaching.

The whole spirit of Vedanta philosophy has been the basis of Vivekananda's theory of education. He defined education as "the manifestation of the perfection already in man"\*\*<sup>1</sup>. Such an understanding of education recalls to our mind the famous saying of Vivekananda that man is potentially divine, he is only to realize the potentiality and manifest it. In the same way, the soul (paramatman) is transcendently present in man. But its presence does not mean that it is within the consciousness of the individual. To bring the soul to the conscious level of the individual, and thereby to make it an object of his own possession, he must, on his

part, realize the soul or manifest it. Vivekananda used to say that everyone is capable to self-realisation provided that he is able to do away with the obstacles. This self-realisation is also the aim of education. If we may speak of Vivekananda's epistemological position, it is all about self-knowledge. What is important in the realm of epistemology is the soil (Atma). This soul is the home of all cognitions. The problem is how to unearth this vast mine of knowledge lying dormant and undiscovered. Education is the means of doing this. The process of education is the process of manifestation, or the essence of education lies in the manifestation of soul or atma the presence of which Vivekananda calls 'Perfection'. Thus the 'Soul' and the 'Perfection' are identical terms to Vivekananda. Manifestation of the soul is the manifestation of perfection. And this is the purpose of function of education.

The principal tone of Vivekananda's educational philosophy centers round the study of human soul (Jiva-atma). Self-manifestation, self-realization, self-perfection, and self-awareness all are identical terms giving out the key-note of his educational philosophy. Thus Vivekananda's philosophy of education gives a soil-centred theory of education.

Vivekananda viewed education in two aspects, first, education in its objective aspect, and second education in its subjective aspect. These two aspects become inter-related, through a relation of reciprocal dependence, at the higher level of achievement of the ultimate end of education. But when the end is achieved half-way, education, then remains purely within objective limits having not so much connection with its subjective aspect. In this subjective level, education is directed towards the study of the Vedanta and this study helps us conquer the deep-rooted superstitious and long-standing ignorance. Without this subjective level, 'perfection' which is the highest end of education, cannot be fully realized only through the

objective medium of education. Thus ‘objectivity’ of education depends upon its ‘subjectivity’ in order to attain the full realization of its supreme end. And again, the subjective aspect of education is empty without its objective counterpart. The subjective process, which is meditation, acts on the materials received through objective medium. Thus here subjectivity is dependent upon objectivity. Education arrives at its goal through the mutual acts of these two processes.

Discussion about any educational theory from the philosophical stand-point involves discussion about the problem of knowledge, viz. its origin, nature and construction. This is because these two that is, education and knowledge are interconnected in the human life. One cannot go without the other. It is a relation between the means and the end. Education is the means and knowledge is the end. While Vivekananda defines education he also deals with the origin and nature of knowledge. According to him, all knowledge is within, nothing in the name of knowledge comes from outside; it is all inside. \*<sup>2</sup> He illustrated his theory of knowledge with an example. Before the law of gravitation was discovered, the law was not absent in Newton’s mind. It was present, though Newton was not conscious about the presence of the law, for his mind was covered with ignorance or avidya. The apple’s fall removed the ignorance and makes the latent law of gravitation patent. “Education and progression simply men taking away the obstacles, and by its own nature the divinity will manifest itself”. \*<sup>3</sup>

Vivekananda’s philosophy of education centres round the study of the self of the individual, and for this he puts emphasis upon the subjective medium of education, which means education is being aware of the true nature of the self. The word ‘manifestation’ used by him in the definition of education is suggestive of this fact. The word ‘perfection’ which is, for Vivekananda, the central theme of education

has by implication a reference to the nature of perfection contained in the divine. Thus education is the study of the human self, its perfection, or un-foldment of the divinity within. To put it in modern terminology education is the drawing out of the latent potentialities already in man and this is to be achieved by the educand himself with the help of external objective means.

Perfection, which is the basic aim of education, implies as its ethical correlate an ideal. It functions as a social standard of the individual's behaviour, his manner and attitude; it also serves as a standard of morality by reference to which an individual's activities in the social realm are judged to be right or wrong.

The educational ideas of Vivekananda involves the metaphysical notion of the oneness of Reality -- a Reality which bifurcates itself into the indeterminate and the determinate. Education, in its larger aim, is concerned both with the determinate and the indeterminate nature of Reality. We study the indeterminate through the purely subjective medium of education, which we have interpreted as self-meditation. The study of the determinate aspect of the reality goes through the objective medium, which may take different forms.

Thus, Vivekananda as an idealist philosopher, propounded a theory of education which is to barrow Kant's terminology transcendentally ideal and empirically real. And so far as epistemology is concerned, he followed the line of critical rationalists whose tenets regarding construction of knowledge are that knowledge is a unity between the internal and external meanings of an idea or an object.

As a true Vedantin, Vivekananda believed that an individual does not have the absolute identity with another individual though they possess within them the

same identical soul or Brahman. He organized his educational theory in conformity with this principle of individual difference. Modern educational psychology takes too much interest in this principle and has framed different types of methods, tests and techniques just to suit the different types of taste, temperament and capacity of different students.

Vivekananda's Vedantism is not merely an ideal of self-realization. His main concern was the social translation of this ideal to actualize the ideal. The ideal is, therefore, real or practical. Though knowledge of Brahman or realization of the soul is regarded as the highest of all knowledge, knowledge about man occupies a central place in Vedanta. Thus education which is mainly a process of self-realization is also regarded as a process of caring for the human body. The body, after all, is the 'temple of God', and the instrument for culture of the soul. He was emphatic on one point and never swerved from it. "Education", he says, "is not the amount of information put into your brain... If education is identical with information then libraries are the greatest sages of the world and encyclopedias are the Rishis". Mind is the instrument of education. "Perfecting the instrument and getting complete mastery of one's own mind is the ideal of education" \*<sup>4</sup>. A soul is always an embodied soul. So, a purely soul-centred theory of education is an incomplete one. It must take into account the study of human physique, which, of course, has no independent existence apart from the soul. Vivekananda's philosophy of education thus aims at an integrated development of all the aspects of the individual life, involving both the soul and the body.

Education, for Vivekananda, is a process in which the young mind will receive strength, energy and form a vigorous character. Thus the larger and nobler aim of education would be 'life-building, man-making, character-making,

assimilation of ideas'. He commented, "the end of all education, all training should be man-making. The end and aim of all training is to make the man grow".\*<sup>5</sup> Education is an instrument, which must produce a strong character. If any education fails to do so that education is meaningless and has no practical value as well. Now, what is that 'character' which education ought to build? Character is an active principle determined by the nature of the results of the activities that the individual performs during the entire period of his life in this world. It is again a combined resultant force created by the world of desires, motives, tendencies and intentions. Vivekananda said, "The character of any man is but the aggregate of his tendencies, the sum total of the bent of his mind. As pleasure and pain pass before his soul, they leave upon it different pictures, and the result of those combined impressions is what is called a man's character". \*<sup>6</sup>

Vivekananda again suggests that actions done by the individual have their indelible effects upon the making of character. Every action a man does, every movement of his body, every thought that he thinks, leaves always an impression upon his mind. Though these impressions do not seem to be obvious on the surface, they are still strong enough to work beneath the surface sub-consciously. What the man is at any moment, is determined by the sum-total of these impressions on his mind, and equally, the character of every man is determined by the sum-total of these very impressions. If these are good impressions, the character becomes good, if bad, the character becomes bad.

Vivekananda referred in this connection to habit which is closely connected with character. To him habit is not the second nature, rather, it is the first nature and even the whole of the human nature. A habit is formed, psychologically, out of the coalescence of the diverse warring impressions upon the mind. Character is formed

out of repeated habits. Habits may be bad or good. A habit, good or bad, when formed, becomes very powerful and it brings the individual of whom it is the habit completely to its swing and does not let him off unless it is removed by counter habits.

The aim of education is to provide conditions under which the individual's personality will foster. By personality we generally mean a set of qualities which makes an individual what he is. Vivekananda understands personally as, "the total quality of the individual's behaviour, as it is revealed in his habits of thought and expression, attitudes and interests, his manner of acting, and his personal philosophy of life". \*<sup>7</sup> Vivekananda interprets personally in terms of the capacity to influence others. He suggests that the force of influencing others comes, in different proportions, from two sources, one third of it comes from the words and thoughts of the individual and the remaining two-thirds come from the individual himself. By the 'individual himself' he may mean either the inner growth and constitution, or the biological qualities and constitution of the individual as a whole.

Now the question is, how the individual's personality can be developed. Vivekananda believed that the development of personality is capable of being effected through regular mental exercises, and through spiritual activities. The philosophy of Yoga in India has formulated different laws by following which one can develop his personality. These laws are not rigid and exclusive in nature. They have an universal application. They express themselves through various channels, actions, love, self-control and knowledge. Thus they are the great sources of developing and strengthening the personality.

The phrase ‘motive power’ of education implies on the one hand the potential force of education itself, which manifests itself through (a) better purposes, (b) better contents, (c) better methods, (d) better conditions, and (e) better teachers. The phrase means on the other hand the actual will force and courage which education as an instrument objectively produces in the minds of the young students. When this is actually done, the young minds are relieved of the play of fear and weakness. The second meaning of the phrase ‘motive power’ describes education as an instrument effects a tremendous will-force and courage in the minds of the students. The education, for Vivekananda, is a true and faithful education which removes away the deep-seated roots of fear and weakness from the minds of the children and gives in its place the lessons of courage, strength and fearlessness. Vivekananda reminds us of the great lessons of strength to be found in every page of the Upanishads. To him : “---- Freedom, physical freedom, mental freedom and spiritual freedom are the watchwords of the Upanishads”. \*<sup>8</sup>

Vivekananda felt the need of health education which would give the students good and strong health. When he raised his eyes and looked at the Indian schools, he saw face to face their poor conditions which gravely shocked him. For this reason Vivekananda thought seriously about the physical condition of the children. He was not only thinking for physical training, but along with it, he wanted to impart such practical training as would make the pupils active, efficient in their daily activities. Through this training, the students will also receive practical insight into judgment of things, and thereby they will develop their power of execution like a realistic thinker, Vivekananda came to realize that all the aims and programmes of education will prove nothing if manual training and means of development of the power of execution are not included in the educational curricula.

The concept of education simply means that education, as an active process as well as an instrument, must provide training equally and simultaneously for the body, brain and the mind. Vivekananda, as a true educationist, believed in this education of the ‘whole man’. Mere physical and intellectual education are op-sided. A man vastly educated only in the principles of the intellect knows nothings of the secret of this heart where lies the sacred love for the eternal, the infinite. Vivekananda wanted such education as would inspire the cultivation of heart. He uttered : “Always cultivate the heart. Through the heart Lord speaks”. \*<sup>9</sup>

In stead of using the phrase ‘education of the mind’ we may use a new phrase ‘sublimation of the mind’. T.S.Avinashilingam has given a definition of the term sublimation : “When activities are raised from lower to higher levels of integration and when there is harmony in that process, the resulting behaviour is sublimation”. \*<sup>10</sup> The world ‘sublimation’ can be explained in two different senses. Sublimation, in the secular sense, means channeling the mental qualities, adversely developed, towards the good. At this level of sublimation, the educationist’s task will be to formulate ways and means through which unfavourable traits of the children are to be transformed into favourable qualities. The second sense of sublimation is the spiritual conversion. Its manifestation is generally found in the sudden change of heart and emotional regeneration affecting mainly the outlook, inner adjustments and habits of life of an individual. Four possible ways are there through which sublimation in the spiritual plain can be achieved. They are : (a) selfless work (Karma Yoga), (b) Love (Bhakti Yoga), (c) Spiritual contemplation (Raja Yoga), and (d) Knowledge (Jnana Yoga).

Vivekananda's approach to education is an integrated approach, a careful and harmonious development of the qualities of head, heart and of the body. As a result, the studies of humanities, liberal art, and social sciences along with technological, technical and scientific studies do not create any contradiction, but rather extend and enlarge the mental horizon of the students, giving them a wider scope, meaning and significance of life. It will give them a scope of extra-thinking of themselves, the world, the universe and even of the reality and the existence, within which they and all other entities, living and non-living are living harmoniously side by side. Here, in getting together, in the meeting and fusion of spiritual and secular studies, lies the tremendous appeal of Vivekananda's theory of education.

Vivekananda's conception of an ideal teacher is also very much consistent with the views of the modern psychology of education. He said : "The true teacher is he who can immediately come down to the level of students, and transfer his soul to the student's soul and see through and understand through his mind. Such a teacher can really teach and none else". \*<sup>11</sup> Vivekananda is of opinion that the students must show faith, humility, submission and veneration towards the teachers. But they must not follow their teachers blindly. As in the words of Vivekananda : "..... too much faith in personality has a tendency to produce weakness and idolatry, worship your Guru as God, but do not obey him blindly. Love him all you will, but think for yourself". \*<sup>12</sup>

With regard to methods of education Vivekananda said that a child educates itself. The teacher "can take away the obstacles. The rest in manifestation, form its own nature". \*<sup>13</sup> The teacher spoils everything by thinking that he is teaching. Within man there is all knowledge, and it requires only an awakening and that much is the work of the teacher. Two more points suggested by Vivekananda in connection with

the discussion of the methods of education may be mentioned here. The first is the freedom of growth and the second is the positivity in education. As every child is already in possession of a vast mine of knowledge, he should have enough freedom to manifest it through the ways sanctioned by his own nature. Violent attempts at reform always end by retarding growth. Secondly, our teaching method must be of positive nature. There is no role of negativity in the attempt with which the teachers help the students unfold their inner potentialities. The teaching must be modified according to the needs of the taught.

According to Vivekananda, concentration is the only method of education. As this concentration and no other process directly and strongly assists the mind in knowing its object and since without it the mind cannot exclusively think over the specific object of interest, it has been called by him the essence of education. This concentration as an instrument throws the mind into the process of knowing. It offers a background to the mind in which the act of knowing becomes actual and possible.

The mind is a single individual entity, the different functions that are apparently are organically related to one another on grounds that they ultimately belong to the same kind. This analysis the interpretation are well admitted by modern psychology. Thus Vivekananda is psychologically correct in his approach to the problem of the process of knowing or the process of self-educating.

Vivekananda was an advocate of education for the women. The latent faculties of the women can be manifested successfully as Vivekananda suggested, through the right type of education suitable to the women. This education should be so framed as to train the India women in all the essential principles of knowledge as well as in the moral and spiritual lines. In this way, the Indian women will attain

equality in all the essential elements of life with men. The success of this education depends upon the correct methods and programme.

Vivekananda suggested an ideal programme of studies for the women. As he said : “Religion, arts, science, house-keeping, cooking, sewing, hygiene, the simple essential points of these subjects ought to be taught to our women. Only teaching rites of worship won’t do; their education must be an eye-opener in all matters. Ideal characters must always be presented before the view of the girls to imbue them with a devotion for lofty ideals selflessness”. \*<sup>14</sup> He further said : “History and the Puranas, house-keeping and the arts, the duties of home life, and the principles that make for the development of an ideal character, have to be taught with the help of modern science and lady students must be trained in ethical and spiritual life. We must see to their growing up as ideal matrons of home in time”. \*<sup>15</sup>

A discussion of Vivekananda’s theory of education will remain incomplete without the mention of his great concern of educating the masses. According to him “the only service to be done for our lower classes is to give them education, *to develop their lost individuality*”. \*<sup>16</sup> In a letter to an acquaintance he writes, referring to the poor, “they cannot find light or education. Who will bring the light to them – who will travel from door to door bringing education to them?” Sometimes he would become so obsessed with the ignorance and poverty of the Indian mass that he felt, “the need of the people of India is not more religion but ‘practicality’ ”. He would often speak of giving them practical training or industrial education to elevate and improve their condition.

For Vivekananda religion is the basis upon which the entire structure of education must stand. But this religion is not one of a particular community, it is the universal religion. Vivekananda said : “Religion is the innermost core of education, I

do not mean my own or any one else's opinion about religion. The true eternal principles have to be held before the people". \*<sup>17</sup> He emphasized the need of religious education specially for the Indian masses as well as the Indian women to whom the ancient Indian culture and tradition have a special appeal and among whom our past heritage still lives and works. Vivekananda's approach to religion which is to be taught to the pupils is perfectly modern. He wanted a religion which is the realization of human excellence as well as human personality through the life-long activities done with greatest purposes and larger ends.

Some may confuse religious education with spiritual instruction on ground that they are same. But taken superficially, they have no connection with each other. By spiritual education we mean in practical sense, education of the heart, which is the home of all emotions. The child's emotions should be so cultivated as to make him conscious about certain values mostly known as spiritual values. These values are love, sympathy, fellow-feeling, appreciation of beauty, love for truth and goodness.

Methods of teaching the spiritual values should be through activities, illustrations and examples. Spiritual education would be more an applied science as its goals are achieved through the principles of application. As methods, we may adopt the ways evolved in the past by the religious associations and monastic orders. These ways, by adaptations, may be used in our homes and educational institutions with a view to giving spiritual training.

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