

“Value Education”: The Need of the Hour? An Assessment of Education Philosophy of Swami Vivekanand and Mahatma Gandhi

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Abstract – Indians have inherited a colonial educational structure which is based on western values and somehow seems to have lost its Indianess. Hence, it has managed to create a generations of men and women who are relentlessly pursuing the rapacious lifestyle in search of happiness and peace, which they are unable to find. This has led to increasing number of cases of depression and even suicides. The West today is turning towards East in search for answers in the spiritual and philosophical traditions. The philosophy of great personalities like Swami Vivekanand and Mahatma Gandhi and especially their views on education are extremely relevant than they ever were. This paper is an attempt to look at the philosophy of these two great personalities in search for answers.

Keywords: Swami Vivekananda, Mahatma Gandhi, Value Education, Spirituality

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Today India has world's youngest population, yet the state is unable to tap the opportunity to its optimum capacity. The concerns of the state and society are unemployment, disillusioned or depressed youth. This poses a central question on our existing education system. Is our education system defective? Has it failed in creating generations which is unable to adjust, which is marks oriented and often gets disillusioned when they face the real competition? The central argument is how one resolves these questions. This paper is an attempt to search for answers in India's historical past especially in the education philosophy of Swami Vivekananda and Mahatma Gandhi.

Both these individuals gave importance to value education in creating a strong nation. Value education essentially implies inculcating in the children compassion for the others and the nation. Indian civilization always had a great value system and is considered to be one of the most tolerant civilizations. Since ages, the Indian education system has imparted value education and hence it was always an integral part of a child's life. Value education, as an indigenous system of education received a setback in the wake of westernization under the colonial rule. The basic idea was to create a generation of elitist who although would look Indian but would be western in their thoughts, mannerism and behavior. Hence a western education system was devised which gave little or no space to the values. This was supported by both the imperialists

and nationalist school of thoughts. It was believed that the west represented material and the east or the Orient represented the spiritual. Since the world in the nineteenth and twentieth century's was replete with great transformations such as industrial revolution, hence there was little space for spiritual. Simultaneous domination by the British of Indian subcontinent along with other revolutions confirmed the belief of superiority of the west. India was considered a barbaric or backward land and the colonial masters took it upon themselves to bring about great transformation. How much of it was achieved is not the subject matter of this paper. What is important to note is the way they attempted the transformation. The central aim of the transformation was self-serving i.e. to create a support structure. They were to be men, who had faith on the British and condemned their own culture and social values. What better way to do than to change the structure of education to suit dual purposes: to suit their administrative requirements and to create a group of loyalists who would support their colonial masters under all circumstances. Hence was launched an educational system based on western model replacing the tradition value education system. For few years, the system appeared to have successfully served the purpose of the British. Soon, it was realized that modern education system created a class of intellectuals who began to question the applicability of the system and their

philosophy on education advocated a system based on value education.

Swami Dayanand Saraswati, social reformer who belonged to the revivalist school was first person to challenge the western model. He revived the earlier model based on value education. New schools were established which were a fusion of western and traditional models and hence were named as such. They came to be called Dayanand Anglo Vedic schools in north western India. Later Swami Vivekanand, Arvind Ghose, Mahatma Gandhi, and Lokmanaya Tilak developed new models of education in which value education was given much importance.

Mahatma Gandhi and Swami Vivekananda were both born in the nineteenth century who not only revolutionized minds of Indians, but also theorized alternative model of development. Although both belonged to different background, one was a religious monk while other was a political monk, yet both played an important role in awakening the minds of Indians. On the one hand Vivekananda stimulated intellectuals of Europe and America with Indian Vedantic Wisdom through his speech in Parliament of World Religions in Chicago and subsequent tour of Europe in last decade of nineteenth century. On the other hand Gandhi exercised his most powerful spiritual weapon of Satyagraha (genesis in the Indian tradition) against the British imperial rule. Both were contemporaries and had witnessed a degeneration process especially of economic and social structure of India in their lives. British policies had given an economic setback to both the rural as well as urban economy. This too had an impact on the social fabric of both rural and urban areas. Gandhi and Vivekananda both can be referred to as the “critical traditionalists”. They did not completely support the banalities of the older tradition; in fact, they rejected whatever was irrational, inhuman or obsolete in Hinduism, such as fatalism, ritualism, sectarianism, rigid caste rules, outdated customs and superstitious beliefs or practices. However, at the same time both advocated reconditioning of Hindu religious thought in such a manner that it could withstand and cope with the new challenges of a changing India. Despite different background both the people inspired the world by their ideas and became a global name. Although they could not meet despite Gandhi trying to meet once, yet Vivekananda had a deep impact on Gandhi’s understanding of India.¹

Gandhi and Vivekanand had similar views on various aspects. For example, the meaning and definition of education; they were both against the colonial discourse on education in which education imparted was universal in nature and had materialistic basis; they both believed that India had to be freed from the foreign control and then only the

spiritualization of education was possible. They understood that the educational system should be based on Vedantic philosophy. Vivekanand saw education as ‘*Education Manifestation of the perfection already in man.*’² He believed that the Indian scriptures mention that knowledge was subsumed within the soul and could not be obtained from the outside. Education hence should be a process through which the inherent knowledge is awakened and a complete development of a human being takes place.³ Vivekananda further said that the object of the ideal system of education should not merely be the advancement of theoretical knowledge but also the advancement of life, development of the highest powers and capacities and the enfoldment of the noblest potentialities of student and enabled at the same time to apply intelligently to his or her own life all the ideas that has been learnt and gathered. This enables promotion of physical, intellectual, moral and spiritual growth. Gandhi expressed similar views on education, he explained as to what he understood by education: ‘*by education, I mean an all-round drawing out of the best in child and man, body, mind and spirit. Literacy is not the end of education nor even the beginning. It is one of the means whereby man and woman can be educated.*’⁴ Gandhi believed that education is process recognizing and developing the qualities a human possesses within. Gandhi was concerned with what the education has to offer to the individual in terms of development and not its tools and subjects. He believed that education is also an ‘*awakening of the soul*’, and ‘*strengthening the inner voice*’ which brings harmonious functioning of the body, heart, mind and soul and stimulates the spiritual, intellectual and physical faculties. Gandhi felt that an undue emphasis on any one of these factors not only negates the basic principles of education but also retards the development of the self.⁵

Vivekanand and Gandhi both stressed more on value education or ‘*character making*’ education. They believed that ultimate aim of education is character development, which is a sure stepping stone to nation-building. Vivekanand said that ‘*Education is not the amount of information that is put into your brain and runs riot there, undigested, all your life. We must have life-building, man making, character-making assimilation of ideas.*’⁶ Gandhi himself continuously worked on his character and believed that education should be such that enables an individual to develop tolerance, love and humanity which are necessary preconditions in imbibing the virtues of non-violence. Gandhi firmly believed that apart from

² *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Volumes 03, Advaita Ashrama, Kolkata, 1989, p. 301

³ *Ibid* p.301

⁴ Harijan, 31-7-1937

⁵ Patel, M.S., *The Educational Philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi*, Navajivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad, 1953. p.131

⁶ *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Volumes 03, Advaita Ashrama, Kolkata, 1989, P.302

¹ <https://www.dailypioneer.com/2015/columnists/the-swami-and-the-mahatma.html>

imparting physical and mental training to a child, training in the moral and spiritual aspects are also crucial to personality development. While teaching the students at the Farms in South Africa, he made constant endeavors towards this training. Gandhi aimed at creating a set of youth who would *'uphold these ideals in their daily lives, and at the same time, devote themselves to the service of the people and the liberation of the country.'*⁷ To quote him, *'your education should be built on the foundation of truth and love. Unless this is done, your education will be rendered useless.'*⁸ His teachings to the students stand testimony to his abiding interest in directing the new generation towards nation-building. As Mukalel observes, *'Not only had Gandhi a concrete conception of such a personality but also he possessed a personality of the kind he wanted others to develop.'*⁹ To quote him again, *'the Gandhian conception of personality is a holistic personality in which every aspect, attitude and aptitude is given a balanced development and his concept of education puts the highest importance on the formation of the individual's personality which will be capable of subsuming the highest and ultimate ideals of human life.'*¹⁰ On the solid ground of the aims or freedoms, we qualify ourselves for the highest freedom which is called *moksha* (liberation) or spiritual freedom. According to him Knowledge of God, self-realization, spiritualism and oneness with God was the ultimate aim of education. Education should liberate body, mind and soul. By liberation he meant liberation from economic, social, political and natural slavery, as well as that of the soul from worldly pursuit to devote itself to higher forms of spiritual. He said that *"True education should result not in the material power, but in spiritual-force."*¹¹ In the wake of western education which was utilitarian in nature, there is reluctance in mixing religion with general form of education. Many scholars opposed this use of religion to create an educational structure. Both Vivekanand as well as Gandhi gave due importance to religion in their scheme of education. Vivekanand stressed that the religion should be the underlying foundation of education but not on any particular religion but universal religion.¹² Vivekananda believed that the younger generation was experiencing a novel age which depended a lot on machines. This in turn gave importance to the materialist values rather than moral and religious values. Any life which had become mechanical was a life not worth living. He believed that the fundamental principles of civilization were being ignored in such cases and hence the world would head towards stagnation and incompetence in the end. The solution to the

banalities of modernization was seen by Vivekananda in creating a value based educational structure. Here, the needs of the civil society were met with when the spiritual self of a human being was awakened.¹³ Gandhi also had similar views. He believed that life without religion was like that a ship without a rudder; and just as a ship without a rudder will be tossed about from place to place and never reach its destination, similarly, the human being without religion will not serve his life's purpose and hence would remain permanently dissatisfied. Like Vivekanand Gandhi too advocated a universal faith which did not make one a fanatic but was a perfect balance of all that was spiritual. Gandhi too stressed that religious scriptures must be part of education curriculum, so that the youngsters will be well versed with their roots and hence will be free of any kind of uncertainty. According to him the youngsters should be trained in their respective religious scriptures. In case of Hindus, he felt that the youngsters should be given a training of hymns and verses from various scriptures and imparts moral training based on such readings. He realized the significance of a good teacher in imparting such education. He abhorred misconduct on the part of students and corporal punishment by teachers. His sole aim was to build moral and spiritual character through love, tolerance and non-violence. For it is the tolerance, truth and non-violence that constitute first steps towards spiritual development. Prayer was an essential part of Gandhian scheme of education. Gandhi also advocated leading an ethically upright life and making it a firm basis of all actions. The stress on inner-voice and value-oriented views, as laid by Gandhi, was a method towards inculcating the religious and spiritual principles in students and making them realize their existential significance. Education that enables the students to elevate themselves to the highest spiritual order was considered as the right education by Gandhi.¹⁴

Both Vivekanand and Gandhi stressed on women education, as they believed, that lack of women education was real cause for the social degeneration of India. They considered education as one of the most important instrument of empowering women. Educating women would free them from ignorance and superstition. Gandhi believed that by spreading women education social evils like child marriage, dowry system and purdah system can be removed.¹⁵ He said that: *'As for illiteracy among women, its cause is not mere laziness and inertia as in the case of men. A more potent cause is the status of inferiority with which an immemorial tradition has, unjustly branded her. The result is a semi-paralysis of our society. Woman has rightly been called the mother of the*

⁷Patel, M.S., The Educational Philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi, Navajivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad, 1953. p.136

⁸ Ibid p. 136

⁹ Mukalel, Joseph C., Gandhian Education, Discovery Publishing House, New Delhi, 1997. p.198

¹⁰ Ibid, p.198

¹¹ Gandhi, M.K., Towards New Education, Navajivan Publishing House, 1953, p.6

¹² The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda, Volumes- 05, Advaita Ashrama, Kolkata, 1989. p.231

¹³ Hussain M, Educational Philosophy of Swami – Vivekanand, Nababharat Publication, Kolkata, 2004, p.66

¹⁴ Patel, M.S., The Educational Philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi, Navajivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad, 1953. p.136

¹⁵ Ibid p.120

race.¹⁶ Vivekanand believed that if the Indian women are trained in a right manner, then they would be able to resolve their issues themselves. Their main aim of imparting women education was to make them strong and conscious of their chastity and dignity. He observes that although men and women are academically inclined yet, women limit themselves to the matters of home and family.¹⁷ Vivekananda and Gandhi both believed that a nation would progress until a correct and all-encompassing structure of education was created and it was ensured that it reached the masses. The onus he felt was on the entire civil society and especially the upper classes to ensure that education reaches the masses. For that great sacrifices might be needed and public rebuke might be faced, but they need to uphold their values and contribute their bit. Gandhi had another take; he believed the focus of the civil society should be on the deprived sections of the society, especially the lower caste. Within the value based system, emphasize should also be placed on importance of hygiene and cleanliness. In this mission, the Harijan Sevak Sanghs played crucial role in educating these deprived sections. Gandhi elaborated on how to teach these children and make them proponent of cleanliness. Gandhi assigned an important role for the teachers in this task and favoured giving detailed instructions to the teachers via pamphlets in their languages. The Sanghs also need to play a crucial role as *‘the programme involves care in the selection of teachers and the training of the staff’ to undertake this onerous task of educating the deprived sections.*¹⁸

CONCLUSION

Indians have inherited a colonial educational structure which was based on western values. Today the west is turning towards East in search for answers, in their spirituality and their philosophy. The materialism has converted the world into a global village at the cost of uniqueness of each culture. India too is facing this threat. The philosophy of great personalities like Swami Vivekanand and Mahatma Gandhi and especially their views on education are extremely relevant than they ever. They both believed that a society should change their educational structure and make it more value oriented. This would enable the world to create a generation of men and women, who would live in a balanced world and respect their surroundings, especially nature and would use and not abuse it. They would understand the value of giving and taking. Both great personalities envisioned a land which would be free of the shackles of the materialistic world and hoped to create a new world.

¹⁶ Harijan, 18-2-1939

¹⁷ The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda, Volumes 09, Advaita Ashrama, Kolkata, 1989, p.106

¹⁸ Patel, M.S., The Educational Philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi, Navajivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad, 1953. p.93

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