

# Mahadevi Verma on Education

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**Abstract** - From a young age, Mahadevi Verma had a deep love for reading and studying. From an early age on, she showed a keen interest in old texts and literature, and she became an expert in Hindi poetry. The Prayag Women's University (Prayag Mahila Vidyapeeth) in Allahabad is where she earned her Master's degree in Sanskrit. Mahadevi Verma, an educator, pushed for equal educational opportunities for women. She fought for equal educational opportunities for women and men in the early 20th century, when doing so was not popular. It was her fervent conviction that empowering women via education was crucial to societal development as a whole. Examine the views of education reformer Mahadevi Verma in this paper.

**Keywords** - Mahadevi Verma, education, Indian literature, learning, teacher.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

According to Mahadevi, everyone should see themselves as lifelong learners, especially in the realm of ideas and emotions. And if he hasn't, then he's closed the door to his own soul and intellect. Despite her reputation as a poetess, she spent most of her life in the classroom. She founded Prayag Mahila Vidyapeeth and remained its head for as long as she could. Some of her famous contemporaries have highlighted that her dedication to education was deliberate; she believed that educational institutions were essential to the growth of a country. According to Sachchidanand Vatsyayan "Agyeya," Mahadevi said that her poetry reflected her leisure time, and that "she would devote the rest of her life to the field of education, where it was required." [1]

In Indian literature, the term "Vidya" (meaning "knowledge" or "education") may have a wide variety of meanings. "S Vidy Y Vimuktye" (roughly translated as "education is that which liberates") was the phrase that Mahadevi liked the best. She said that education has always been tightly controlled by the state since traditional Indian scholars placed a high value on it.

Mahadevi gave a two-pronged analysis of education, discussing both its internal and external structures. The internal structure consists of the perceptive subject and its communication, whereas the external structure includes the Juru (the instructor), the discipline, the curriculum, and the environment. The lotus of education is comprised of these six elements, with each of the six petals being carefully bound together by language; in the lack of language, the petals may disperse or fall off. [2]

That's why she called education "the heart of society" since it constantly circulates fresh ideas across government, academia, the arts, and the wider culture. If the fresh blood brought into the system via education is healthy, then the system will continue to be healthy and productive. "If disease germs got into the system, everything would change dramatically," though. The current condition of affairs in our nation sadly demonstrates the accuracy of this assertion.

According to Mahadevi, ancient Indian philosophers carefully evaluated education because they believed it moulded human potential and regulated unchiseled animal impulses. Therefore, rejecting education might lead to a return to barbarism in human civilization. Unfortunately, this is a reality that is reflected in a lot of nations throughout the world right now.

This historical context is essential for appreciating Mahadevi Verma's opposition to dividing schools along lines of tradition and progress. She had mentioned how we'd erred by not seeing our earlier successes as necessary for our development today. The only way to add new links to the century's long golden chain of development is to include the lines of tradition, which carry the history of human progress into the situation of the new age. Plants are the only plants that can withstand hot or cold winds from any direction because they are firmly anchored in their own soil. They can be kept alive by the life-giving wind of Mly but not by the heavenly water of rain if they leave the base of their soil. Rabindranath Thakur highlighted the same idea, saying that

liberation from the soil's bondage is no freedom for the tree.

That's why Mahadevi cautioned our postmodern minds:

*Many civilizations have disappeared because they lost touch with their past accomplishments; history bears this up. She was not completely blind to the reality that occasionally less desirable aspects of the past were also retained in the process of translating it into the present. Unfortunately, India also had to endure lengthy centuries of foreign captivity, during which time it was more important to maintain cultural traditions than to prioritise useful over useless items. Thus, it's possible that 'a priceless element was lost and a worthless element was saved' on occasion. That's not a huge deal, however, since Mahadevi maintains that the only values that endure over time are the ones that can be shown to be valuable no matter what comes their way.*

From her extensive education, Mahadevi learned that imparting knowledge was far more challenging than gaining it. Therefore, the field of education was a two-sided, enigmatic laboratory in which teachers had to help their students build a strong sense of self while also facilitating positive relationships with the wider world. In order to make the goals of education more clear, Indian philosophers always felt that it was important to classify Vidy into Pr and Apr, or for the benefit of others and valuable in itself, respectively. In contrast to Pr, Apr is the social context in which one might grow spiritually.

*When it comes to teaching and learning, Mahadevi shares many ideas with the well-known Russian author Leo Tolstoy. Both agreed that education, although often defined as "preparation for life," is better understood as the ultimate goal of one's existence when seen in its larger context. There is no such thing as "the final goal of education," as Tolstoy had highlighted. Instead, real schooling was supported and guided by the law of perpetual evolution. Therefore, by definition, a man's education is permanent and unending.*

We must realise that a society is severely disrupted if these classical allusions to education are misunderstood or disregarded. The real significance of education is lost if it is seen as a means just to further one's career, for example. An education of this kind transforms into an effective and meaningful preparation for adulthood. It causes a wide range of illnesses to spread across a culture. A person who views education only through the lens of personal advancement and material gain is not only harmful to the nation and society as a whole, but is also "a feeble person, who is devoid of self-perception."<sup>[3]</sup>

These were not theoretical considerations for Mahadevi Verma; rather, they were empirical realities in the classroom. There may be real problems if precautions weren't taken, and it wouldn't matter whether the causes of such problems could be pinpointed or not. According to her, "from the beginning to the end, children are usually not given a moral education and no attention is paid to building their character." As a result, it's becoming more rare to meet young guys "whose life contains the values of principles, courage, indomitable bravery, and sense of respect and reverence for women."

Mahadevi argues that a child is "undeveloped" and that "the question of the goal of his education is left unattended" when it comes to their development. He is now in his formative years as an adolescent. So his education, the final goal, is disregarded. But when a young person enters active life with an unhealthy body and a dissatisfied mind, he meets his responsibilities on his own, creating a critical scenario for both himself and society. This situation has reached a new level of gravity in our nation.

Mahadevi was distressed to see India's prolonged era of foreign-imposed defeat:

*And along this cursed trip, it lost a vital part of its population: its educational ethos. It is generally accepted that a conqueror wants more than just control over the territory he has conquered. He also seeks educational dominance over the defeated as a means to achieve cultural triumph. Therefore, a nation controlled by foreigners cannot have the same educational goals as a country with its own government.*

It is ironic that India's effective intelligentsia, after the country was independent, could not grasp this reality or take the necessary steps to combat it. However, the truth remains that Mahadevi's educational philosophy was fully in line with that of nationalist visionaries like Rabindranath Thakur, Swami Vivekananda, Shri Aurobindo, and Mahatma Gandhi. According to her, "a self-governed nation has to build able heirs for its valuable treasury of culture, society, and nation," whereas the rulers of an enslaved country require just the helpers among the enslaved people in order to merely perpetuate the status quo. Therefore, it would not be strange if the goals of education differed greatly between the two situations, given that "functionally as well with results."<sup>[4]</sup>

The development of Mahadevi's ideal qualities as a future citizen—including confidence in oneself, pride in one's country, and the will to fight against injustice—could have occurred only in a free country, she says. For the ruling class, the emergence of a new generation of governed people is "more threatening than weapons" when a country is under foreign rule. Our educational field is in disarray due to our failure to improve the subpar infrastructure

established by the colonial rulers. There is no path forward if we refuse to admit that a free society cannot coexist with an education that is not free.

When it came to schooling, Mahadevi also kept tabs on developments throughout the globe. Comparing nations where citizens' bodies were free but their souls were enchained with those where citizens' souls were free but their bodies were under harsh servitude, she concluded that education played a crucial role in both.

Location at the epicentre of wireless activity. From this, she deduced that a new generation was being born in the dark recesses of human awareness, and that their suffering was preparing them for peace. This lethargy was not due only to a lack of material conveniences. If it were the true, then there wouldn't be any discontent among the student bodies of materially affluent nations like the United States of America.[5]

As a result of scientific progress, the world has become one in Mahadevi's eyes. Political disagreements, however, are further polarising the population. Instilling a sense of a greater purpose in life is the only way to bring harmony to this seemingly chaotic environment. However, in India, it is difficult to instill a sense of creativity in pupils since their internal and external environments are so chaotic. The first Indian generation to grow up in a free country has quite different aspirations. Although the 1st generation is no longer reliant on their parents, they have not yet achieved liberation from mental servitude.<sup>6</sup> Our students' ability to learn and grow has been severely hampered by the prevalence of this illness. Despite the availability of education, training, and several channels of communication, we still have no idea what kind of training our kids need. Since this topic is outside of the scope of literature, there are none available. Scripture, philosophy, and dharma all teach this. In other words, it's in the things we've convinced ourselves are essential at the expense of competitiveness.[6]

Students may be disgruntled for a variety of reasons, including a lack of job prospects after completing their study and the instigation of political parties. However, it must be recognised that the alteration of one's life's values and beliefs causes great unease. They go through elementary schools, secondary schools, colleges, and universities without ever understanding what they are working for. Our educational system "has not paid attention to the holistic development of a human being at any level," from basic school on up.

Some people are lucky enough to obtain employment after graduation, while others feel that their time was wasted in college. However, this isn't being considered at all. It's the same in a culture where self-governance is the norm. It is watching helplessly as its young is wasted, unable to come up with the solutions that are clearly needed. We've seen that

millions of young people are running in a hopeless rat race to get good employment. Therefore, students are perplexed since they have no livelihood solutions while having completed rigorous academic training and are being blamed by society for their predicament. Some politicians take advantage of students in this vulnerable position for their own objectives.

Mahadevi argues that students would be less likely to become involved in politics if they had access to education tailored to their own interests and abilities. No student ever has or ever will face this question. Only when he reaches a particular level of maturity and is called upon to do his social responsibility will it emerge. Only then will it help others. A student who is interested in science, art, or literature may see that becoming involved in politics at the wrong moment would be a waste of his time if he discovers the desired route for his creative talent to evolve and bloom. In addition to warning political activists against exploiting students as pawns, Mahadevi had urged them to alter their behaviour for the sake of society as a whole. "Sects of politics scare me more than sects of religion," she remarked.[7]

However, Mahadevi believes that education's inner essence and the medium itself provide the greatest challenge. It is self-evident that only a child's native language can serve as an effective medium of instruction. However, from a psychological perspective, the topic of language is equally concerned with culture and a feeling of national identity, particularly for a country like India, which has been subjugated as a nation while possessing rich culture.

Most kids struggle with the English language at school, and those who don't wind up being unable to learn anything new or express themselves fluently because of it. We should be aware that this problem still exists today. While the English language may help certain students, it also fosters feelings of inferiority and intellectual dullness in our otherwise bright young people. Not once has this been considered. We have been able to fight the ebb and flow of enslavement because to the foresight of our great thinkers and seers, as Mahadevi so eloquently points out. For that duration of time, language has been the centre of attention. Put with Srswti.

Since Mahadevi is a caring educator, she believes that the difficulty her students have learning English is a direct result of the close connection between language and the emotions they feel when speaking it. As the saying goes, "nothing can be more miserable for a thinking person than his inability to express himself," and this mentality can only lead to harmful behaviour. This experience-based conclusion was not only an analysis but also a warning, and by rejecting it, we have not taken the proper action. Mahadevi further attempted to

convince our country's intellectuals and educators who think some colonial legacies are irretrievable.[8]

There is "no strength to bestow humanism" in the educational system provided by the foreign invaders, she said. For many of us, being able to speak a foreign language is not only evidence that we are well-educated and cultured, but also the medium through which we received that education. As a result, it's understandable that many of us cringe at the prospect of life without it. Since most people believe that death is the ultimate goal of human beings, they could see treatment as necessary. Therefore, the freedom of our inner world, our inner world, is essential to the realisation of our vision. The chain that binds the soul is stronger than the chains that connect the body, thus this job is difficult and requires special efforts.

Mahadevi, a woman of wide perspective, advocated for us to see that the problems of nations with old cultures are not that dissimilar from our own. Those who lived in very new civilizations didn't have many options. There was nothing to worry about even if they did alter. However, nations with old cultures stand to lose a lot from the inevitable reckless. If, in the name of progress or radical change, we sacrifice our valuable legacy, we will have let down not only our own people but all of mankind. Saying that anything cannot be helped is, therefore, a plain defeatist attitude if a colonial legacy has become a fetter on the natural development of millions of Indians. A river that originates in the Himalayas, whether it a little stream or a large river, does not need directions from rocks, as Mahadevi so eloquently put it. Has it ever requested gold, silver, or platinum be deposited into special accounts for it? Nothing to that effect was ever said. Moving with a brisk pace over the mountains, it eventually overtakes everything in its path, and it is her principle to create her own banks. In a same vein, it is up to our nation's intellectual elite to pave the way for the rest of the population to emerge victorious from centuries of mental enslavement, not just the elite. Furthermore, this task cannot be completed by just copying the methods and techniques of others.

Our educational system's ultimate goal should be to facilitate a "alive" and "natural" connection between students and their culture. Education can't only focus on making students successful in the workforce. It would be a gloomy phenomena if economic development wasn't synchronised with the evolution of the self. You wouldn't accept if someone offered you a trip to Mars in return for the Ganga-Yamuna. Since we ourselves are composed of elements from this world, we naturally feel a deep connection to it.[9]

Its message may be harmonised with scientific knowledge, but not abandoned in favour of it. Making one's own material well-being the only purpose of one's education is a fatal mistake. The result of such would be a loss of money. To understand this, consider the situation in the so-called developed

nations. 'Mental unemployment' is the result of such selfish thinking, and it's just as depressing as regular unemployment. Higher education has not only "transformed itself into absolute dissatisfaction with life," but it has also become "a means to get the necessary amenities for a comfortable life," according to Mahadevi.

However, she is confident that Indian students will be able to "face the challenges of the present times, and contribute significantly." If they could only see their own abilities, so many opportunities would present themselves to them. This, however, requires the individual to exercise self-control over their own life. We can't fortify ourselves from the inside out if we don't have a well-disciplined and balanced life. Mahadevi used electricity as an example of something that is present everywhere but cannot be harnessed to produce a single watt of power. In order for the city to be illuminated, the electricity must first be connected to the city's epicentre, or "powerhouse."

The human heart undergoes a similar procedure. A gloomy cloud may be dispelled by focusing on and holding one's inner and outer fortitude, as well as one's faith, belief, and the force of one's soul. Everything that stands in your path will go. She believed that the societal breakdown might be halted and that societal life would be free of all inequality if today's student recognised his latent strength. A weak and vulnerable country is what might happen if he fails to recognise his responsibility.[10]

When considering the importance of literature and the arts in the classroom, Mahadevi had a remarkable insight. In most cases, we see literature as a minor aspect of language studies rather than an integral component of education. According to Mahadevi, reading should play a crucial role in every student's education. She thought of it as "a chemical capable of eliminating the inconsistencies of life." By means of historical context, she reminded us that a relationship of conqueror and conquered is formed between two nations when the command of military force is used, but peace is always achieved via the influence of literature. Consequently, "We have to give such importance to literature and culture in education that a student may get the message of unity, fraternity, or brotherhood of humans and ultimately would become a more complete person."

The value of Mahadevi Verma's ideas on the place of women in society and in higher learning is well known to those who are familiar with her works. "Until now, through her, thousands of girl students have been benefited and become dignified," the famous Hindi poet (Mhrwi) Nirala once said about Mahadevi. Furthermore, "Mahadevi is larger than Sarojini Naidu in the field of education. Her Hindi I thought is undoubtedly more brilliant than the ideas of many great men.[2] The ancient Indian goddess Mahadevi underlined the need of learning from the work of the great woman scholars of India. She

studied our country's long-standing emphasis on girls' education and women's prominent roles in society. "There has been co-education with common methods of teaching," Mahadevi claims of the Indian educational system. Graduated women were also active in education after completing their degrees. It lasted until the 11th and 8th centuries. However, after many foreign invasions, significant reforms were implemented in our nation.[11]

One of her primary interests was effecting the necessary change in the lives of women. Today's Indian women, she says, rule over a vast "empire of ignorance." However, many girls are losing positive qualities due to the contemporary education that is now being taught to them. "We can't easily say about a girl student that she is an inquisitive student, because she comes out of her home like an unrestrained butterfly, far from the reality and sensitivity of life, and does not mind becoming the centre of attraction of others." [13] As a result, "qualities like simplicity and humility, in illiterate women" are possible, but "almost all the so-called literate women hardly have more than the ability to recognise letters and read some novels in exchange for giving up all their qualities." Mahadevi suggests that the incorrect kinds of educators are to blame for the current state of affairs. "If our children learn and get education under the guidance of such persons who do not have character and principles, who carry inherent weakness out of their own poor education and character, all these weaknesses would also affect the students," said the author. Saddening to Mahadevi is the fact that we do not value in our educators the same qualities that we do in those who do routine work.

*Our lackadaisical treatment of the educators who are shaping the lives of the women who will raise the next generation is a terrible sin. True education, which allows a person to sense peace in his life and make it beneficial for others, entails providing the tools for mental growth that is country-specific, society-specific, and culture-specific. A person who lacks cultural understanding, is superficial, and lacks strength of character is unfit for this crucial role.*

To Mahadevi, emulating Western society was counterproductive to the advancement of women in India. Also, women become even more helpless and reliant on males as a result of striving for mechanical equality with them. And those 'weak, powerless, and worthless degree holders' should never be held up as examples of masculinity to aspire to by women. Educated women who reject their innate talents and try to imitate males often end up disappointed. [15] Despite appearances, such women suffer a loss of moral and ethical principles. It would be as

absurd as chopping one's foot to imitate a crippled person if we followed "such suicidal approaches of the western world." [12]

Hedonism is at the heart of western mentalities. Therefore, even if the social niceties of western nations may seem commendable, interactions between men and women usually may not rise beyond such restrictions. Therefore, in Mahadevi's view, if our women adopt the western model of freedom, it would lead to various types of distortion and misuse, rather than towards peace, which is the lifeblood of a community. Finally, Mahadevi has evaluated the current educational system in India and its effect on the country's intellectual landscape. The current educational system, she said, "is not a bridge to bring us nearer but has become a big gulf to divide us, which our selfishness is widening day by day." After acquiring this instruction, we strive to transform into somebody the average Joe would be wary of befriending. Therefore, it stands to reason that this style of schooling turns our intellectuals into a hi-fi group that has no common ground with the Indian people and that the Indian people feel uncomfortable mingling with them. It's more accurate to say that there are certain scholars "in whom education has turned into poison like the drops of Swti (wksht) changes in the mouth of a snake." [13]

This is why the so-called "intellectuals," who think so highly of themselves, are utterly incapable of serving the national interest. People "whose euew totally lme drem, wd who belieue tht just by attaching some foreign feathers, they have turned into messengers of heaven," live and grow up with this inferiority complex for the most part. Because of their western conditioning, even their most repulsive ideas are reduced to superficial beauty. Their most rudimentary ideas, patched together with ideas from elsewhere, are accepted as gospel. Women intellectuals are just like males in this regard. [14]

Educated women "have silently adopted the weaknesses of men and come to visualise this condition as the reflective of success," as the proverb goes. Because of this, [19] most women intellectuals likewise place more value on abstract thought experiments than on the honest and straightforward emotions of the general public. They promote personal misunderstandings as if they were insightful discoveries, and use this so-called "knowledge" to further their own narrow interests. [15]

Saddened, Mahadevi noted that such thinkers often display blurred cultural boundaries and inadequate depictions of human existence. This is why she urged us to keep our cultural identities close even while we explored the world on our own. In terms of her impact on India's intellectual history, Mahadevi is in a class of her own. Mahadevi put in a lot of time and energy into everything she wrote and spoke about during her life, and it wasn't only women's

education. Even now, we may learn from her perspectives:

*I'm wondering, on this first night apart,*

*When referring to time, how much has passed/what has stayed the same?*

*The particles sing and time reverberates,*

*Whenever they grudgingly make their way this way,*

*I wrote something selfless for them to read.*

*I had left behind an enduring impression.*

## 2. CONCLUSION

Inspiring and far-reaching, Mahadevi Verma's contributions to the fields of education and literature. She was a pioneering educator and famous Hindi poet who advocated for women's education and empowerment at an era when such a thing was not commonly recognised. Her writings and advocacy forever etched the importance of education in moulding people and developing progressive ideals into the fabric of Indian society.

The life and work of Mahadevi Verma are a monument to the power of education as a tool for societal change and individual development. She places a high priority on education as a tool for improving society and spreading good values because she recognises the power that information and education have to change people's lives for the better. Her works, especially her poetry in Hindi, have endured and inspired many people over the years. She wrote poetry, essays, and short tales that empowered women to challenge convention and create positive change in their communities.

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