

Education of Women: Swami Vivekananda and Mahatma Gandhi

Nilava Patra

Abstract: Starting from the late nineteenth century up to the beginning of the twentieth century, Mahatma Gandhi and Swami Vivekananda were two of the greatest men born in colonial India as well as Bengal. None of Gandhiji and Swamiji wanted to keep education only in any institution. In the thought of Swami Vivekananda the inspiration for patriotism and nationalism was seen as the spread of women's education. Swami Vivekananda thoroughly discussed the purpose of education of general people as well as the purpose of education for the poor, oppressed, poor women of India. Gandhiji emphasized the importance of raising fully educated women like Swami Vivekananda. Gandhiji wanted to create an education system in which women could be educated, and with it they could become self-reliant.

Keywords: Women, Education, Men, Nationalism, Institution,

When Swami Vivekananda and Mahatma Gandhi were born, women were considered second class citizens. In every place the women were disrespected. We all had a firm belief that only women will be engaged in the work of dynasty and family work. However, it is responsible for many parts of the political and social context of that time. It is estimated that all the people of the medieval times of monstrous behaviour created new rules on women's education. May be they were trying to push the women's chastity to the darkness of their interior area. Later, when India becomes enlightened in the light of western civilization, many intellectuals and educators started thinking about education again. Among them Swami Vivekananda and Mahatma Gandhi's name are the most important.

Swami Vivekananda's personal opinion was that overall development of the country is not possible if women are not well- educated in every education. So Swami Vivekananda gave the definition of education: "Education is the manifestation of the perfection already in man."¹ Therefore education is to develop all the latent capabilities of a person. In the words of Swami Vivekananda, people are not only human beings formed by various organs but people are the manifestations of the God. Because the *Brahmanjñāna* is present in man from the very beginning, we just need to awaken the *Brahmanjñāna*. And this awakening is achieved by education.

Like Swami Vivekananda, Gandhiji discussed about women's education. So at first we have to know, by what means, we should improve the status of women. And not just talking about the development of women, we need to look at how this improvement can be done. So, after taking deeply about this, we can see that among the movements that were going on India at that time, the issue of women's education was also one of the reason Gandhiji organized an annual agitation on February 20, 1918. And there he spoke of improving the status of women of India, According to Gandhiji "Empowerment may mean equal status to women and provide opportunity and freedom to develop them. Man should control the pleasure of sense and not consider the women just a sex object."²

In Hinduism, the change of ages has been achieved over time. Gandhiji always prayed to God for the betterment of the woman nation so that women could establish their own rights. At the way Gandhiji wanted to educate women, women were very few in his society. So Gandhiji told each woman to face the situation in the current predicament. Gandhiji knew from the outset that the current situation of women would not be solved by teaching only education. That is why Gandhiji was against this rule. Because the main purpose of Gandhiji's life was to end all obstacles in the society of women through which they could establish themselves as men. So not only do we have to study, but also women have to learn how to write, read, and draw. By learning about these subjects, women's intelligence will become more developed and sharpened. As a result, they will be able to work in more courses. That is why Gandhiji could never deny the value of knowledge in these subjects besides education. Because Gandhiji noticed that women were being deprived of illiteracy in society. But it is improved for women to learn these things in order to establish themselves in the society and develop their talent otherwise; they will not be able to leverage their talent to millions of people. For this reason, Gandhiji prepared a personal enterprise for women to pursue education for the betterment of the nation as well as for other subjects.

Swami Vivekananda gave greater importance to the Vedic period in the content of discussion of the development of women. He in course of discussing political situation of India and the various social reform movements he pointed out that women had become second class citizens today. But the main reason for this is hidden and that is the lack of education for women. Whatever be the reason, in the path of education for Women. So Swami Vivekananda chose the path of women's education as a way of fulfilling women's progress. Social workers of different countries of the world have strongly supported the development of women's education. However, there are many differences between Swami Vivekananda's women education and other social workers I process of their education. In other countries more emphasis was given on the practical aspect of women's education. But Swami Vivekananda emphasized the spiritual education of women.

Swami Vivekananda was a great symbol of socialism, and paid great respect to the spiritual doctrine. So Swami Vivekananda wanted to build his women's education on a spiritual basis.

In the education of women, Swami Vivekananda has given most importance to two things - first the spiritual education of women and practical education that will be used in the work of women. Swami Vivekananda had discussed the spiritual education of women a long time ago, but despite being such a spiritual monk, he also talked about aspects of practical education for women. Swami Vivekananda knew very well that women have to observe the worldly life. And all the responsibility of the world (*samsāra*) lies with the women. For this reason Swami Vivekananda had never denied the importance of the practical life of women. Because we know that almost half of the population of our country is women, so, according to Swami Vivekananda, women have to look after their family just as they have to look after themselves. That is why Swami Vivekananda focused on the practical life of women in women's education. He always respected women. We all know that from the body of women another new body i.e., a child is born in the world. So Swami Vivekananda gave the highest respect to women power. That is why, Swami Vivekananda gave the importance of education of women from the core of his heart. That is why Vivekananda sincerely wanted women to be able to stand on their own feet throughout India. Swami Vivekananda saw every Woman as a symbol of the birth giving mother. So Swami Vivekananda announced with pride, to worship all the deities and Vivekananda wants to set up a women's math to expose the dormant Brahman among women. So Swami Vivekananda said, "I never objected to the worship of women who are the living embodiment of divine mother, whose external manifestations, appealing to the senses have made men, but whose internal manifestations, such as knowledge, devotion, discrimination and dispassion make man omniscient, of unfailing purpose, and a knower of Brahman. She, when pleased, becomes propitious and the cause of the freedom of man. Without propitiating the mother by worship and obeisance, not even Brahmā and Viṣṇu have the power to elude Her grasp and attain to freedom. Therefore for the worship of these family goddesses, in order to manifest the Brahman with them, I shall establish the women's math...."³

Swami Vivekananda had planned for such a monastery for a long time and he wanted to entrust women to the main responsibility of that monastery. Like the position of Ramakrishna in the centre of the men's field, Shrima Sarada Devi's position in each field for women is similar. Inspired by the ideals of Shrima Sarada Devi, the female Brahmachārī will live as monks. So Swami Vivekananda said, "The Holy mother will be their central figure and the wives and daughter of the devotees of Ramakrishna will be its first inmates. For they will easily appreciate the usefulness of such a math. After that, following their example, many householders will help in

this noble work.”⁴

Swami Vivekananda personally believed that the noble women Brahmachari could accomplish the welfare of the country. Swami Vivekananda says that if one Brahmacharini can be wise among women, then thousands of women will be inspired by the expression of her personality. As the country progresses, society will improve with it. So Swami Vivekananda established schools run by women. Where the Brahmacharis will manage the school and they will arrange for other women to stay. So Swami Vivekananda says “The duty of teaching in the school for girls ought to devolve absolutely on education of widows and Brahmacharinis. It is good to avoid in this country any association of man with women’s schools.”⁵

Gandhiji did not make any difference between man and women. He honoured man in the same way as he honoured women. So he said, “I make no distinction between son and daughter. Such distinction in my opinion is invidious and wrong. The birth of a son or a daughter should be welcomed alike. They complement each other. Each one of them, according to him, needs the active help other”⁶. In Swami Vivekananda, we also see the same thought. Swami Vivekananda compared society with a bird. A bird has two wings. So the bird could fly with two wings. But if one of the two wings is not nutritious, then the bird cannot fly better. So Swami Vivekananda compared society with birds. On one side, there will be women and on the other hand there will be man. Therefore, like men, women’s participation in a noble work equally is very important for the development of society and the overall country.

Gandhiji has always talked about the development of women’s education like Swami Vivekananda. Gandhiji presented us very well in the political and social movements in which the women played the role. We think that girls are weak, but Gandhiji has corrected the weakness of girls and used them for the development. Gandhiji felt that tolerance, serviceability, and compassion etc. belong to women’s character. Gandhiji also talked about the right to freedom of women reputedly. He has enrolled women as the female voter and also talks about their political education. Gandhiji said repeatedly about giving women the right place in society. Because, society and country in which women cannot be respected, that country or society cannot be said to be civilized. So Gandhiji looked at our current society and he repeatedly highlighted the education of women. That is why Gandhiji first wanted to educate women in celibacy. Gandhiji was forced to awake such a statement by pointing to the present society because one of the main causes of the plight of the present society is the stagnation of relations between women and men. So Gandhiji wanted to awaken the self-restrained spirit of the relationship between men and women. And without teaching or of Brahmachariya’s teaching, this is not done because Gandhiji believed that a life devoid of Brahmacharya is the same as animal behaviour. Animal do not obey the rules of

self-control because of their natural causes. Only human beings can afford self-control. Therefore it is not only the practice of Brahmacharya, but also the restraint of the senses. It is only performing Brahmacharya that the body leads to goodness; it requires restraint of every part of the senses. So Gandhiji thought it would be a wonderful thing for women to develop themselves to the work of country, inspired by the norm of nonviolent education. But Gandhiji is always worried about how many women can accomplish this adventure. Because he knew marriage was a moral issue in woman's lives. By getting married, women can recruit themselves in the service of the country by instilling self-control. But to complete this task it requires a lot of sense restraint, so Gandhiji has discussed this issue long ago.

So in the end, it can be said that Swami Vivekananda and Gandhiji planned a learning curve where women can be educated and able to stand on their own feet. Beginning in the 1980s, discussion on women education continues to this day. Prior to independence, women were identified as the main symbol of India's society. Even in the Vedic period, great ideals were observed among women. So Swami Vivekananda said about woman "Religion, arts, science, housekeeping, cooking, sewing, hygiene, the simple essential points of these subjects ought to be taught to our women. It is not good to let them touch novels and fictions....But 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 devotion for lofty ideals of selflessness. The noble examples of Sita, Savitri, Damayanti, Lilabati, Khana and Mira should be brought home to their minds and they should be inspired to mould their lives after them."⁷ So, due to social movements some of our attitudes may have changed but only change is not enough. There are more ways we'll have to walk. Do not forget that we are born from women. As we grow older, we get women as a wife. Therefore, women should be given the ability to think independently without leaving them in the house. So in this regard Gandhiji said, "Women is the companion of man gifted with equal mental capacities. She has right to in the minutest detail of the activities of man and she has the same right of freedom and liberty as he"⁸

In the preindependence era, women were brought to the service of the family by fitting their purity and chastity. Then one thing was to say that there is no place for women in the outside of the external world. Women only invest their labour in the family service. And in the morning, one of his sons will say that the mother will eat the food, another will say the mother will go out. Only in the home work and cooking she will lose his own self. But Vivekananda and Gandhiji wanted to educate their women in different teachings to bring back the self- esteem of women. They tried to develop women's talent beyond their home. Therefore, to achieve freedom of thought, it is necessary to have the ultimate goal of awakening women's education. The western philosopher

Plato has taken the women's education system a great deal. So the western philosopher Plato says to tell about women's education "you must not suppose that what I have been saying applies to men only and not to women as far as their nature can go."⁹

So can we not do anything to see the smile that women society is associated with our lives? Will we always consider her as second class citizen? Today we all have to find answer to this question which lies in the future of India's generation. Because if we want to improve the position of the country then we have to bring the women back to her proper position. One thing that we must remember is that the ancient India never neglected women. If she is ignored, then Indian civilization and development is not possible. There is a new custom about women awakening, where the main thing is that there will be no division between men and women, they should be equally treated. Therefore, the role of Swami Vivekananda and Mathma Gandhi in the context of the awakening of women and women education in this direction is still relevant today.

Notes and References

1. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Vol. IV, Mayabati, Almora Ashram, 1966, p. 304.
2. Gangrader, K. D. : *Gandhi and Empowerment of Women* , Gandhi Marg , Volume 22, 200, p.437.
3. Vivekananda, Swami : *My India The India Eternal*, Ramkrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Gol Park, Kolkata, 2018, P. 75.
4. Ibid, P. 75.
5. Nirvedananda, *Swami : Our Education*, Vidyamandira, Dhakuria, Kolkata, West Bengal, 1945, P. 21.
6. Jain, Pratibha : *Gandhian Ideas - Social Movements and Creativity*, p. 142.
7. Nirvedananda, *Swami : Our Education*, Vidyamandira, Dhakuria, Kolkata, West Bengal, 1945, P. 117.
8. M.K. Gandhi : *Women and Social Injustice*, Navajivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad, 1942, p. 68.
9. Plato : *Republic*, Paul Shoney (Trans. and Ed.) Heinemann, 1930, London, P. 540.

Bibliography

1. *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Vols. 2-7, Advaita Ashrama, Calcutta, 2003,2004, 2002
2. Dr. Radhakrishnan, *Our Heritage*, Hind Pocket Books , Delhi, 1973
3. Ranganathananda, Swami : "Swami Vivekananda, the Spiritual Teacher of Modern India" *Prabuddha Bharata*, May, 1963

4. Satprakashnanda, Swami : *Vivekananda's Contribution to the Present Age*, Vedanta Society of Louis, Kolkata & USA, 1978
5. Provananda, Swami : *Bhagvad Gītā*, Advaita Asharam, Kolkata, December, 1987
6. Vivekananda, Swami : *Education*, T.S. Avinashi Lingam (Comp. & Ed.) Sri Ramakrishna Mission, Coimbatore, Madras, 1967
7. Liddle, J and Josh R: *Daughter of Independence : Gender, Caste and Class in India*, London, 1986.
8. Agarwal, Shriman Naryan : *Gandhain Constitution for Free India*, Allahabad, Kitabistan, 1946.
9. Bose, Anima : *Dimensions of Peace and Non-violence : the Gandhin Philosophy of Conflict*, Bombay, Oxford University Press, 1959.
10. Bose, N.K, *Studies in Gandhism*, Ahmedabad, Navajivan Publishing House, 1962.
11. Bose, N. K. : *Gandhiji The man And His Mission*, Bharatiya Vidya Bhawan, Bombay, 1966.
12. Bose, N.K. : *Selecation from Gandhi*, Navajivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad, 1972.
13. Brown, Judith M : *Gandhi and Civil-Disobedience*, London, Cambridge University Press, 1977.
14. Gandhi, M.K. : *Hind Swaraj or Indian Home Rule*, Navajivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad, 1975.