

Swami Vivekananda's Philosophy on Education

A Study Report on:

**SWAMI
VIVEKANANDA'S
PHILOSOPHY ON
EDUCATION**

For Project Titled:

**Reviving India's Rich Cultural Heritage:
Exploring Indian Philosophy and
Economy in the Context of NEP 2020**

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1. Introduction

Swami Vivekananda, originally named Narendra Nath Datta, was born into an affluent family in Kolkata on January 12, 1863. Upon graduating from Calcutta University, he had acquired profound knowledge in diverse subjects, particularly Western philosophy and history. Possessing a yogic temperament from a young age, he immersed himself in meditation and briefly associated with the Brahmo Movement.

Vivekananda staunchly believed that a nation's progress is intricately linked to the advancement of its people. He emphasized that education should closely align with the path of comprehensive human development. His educational philosophy encompassed diverse goals, ranging from individual growth to societal improvement, and extending to universal development. The curriculum he advocated mirrored his philosophy, emphasizing self-development, capacity building, and the holistic progress of humanity.

2. Swami Vivekananda's views on Education

“We want that education, by which character is formed, strength of mind is increased, intellect is expanded and by which one can stand on one's feet.”

-Swami Vivekananda

Being one of the greatest spiritual leaders, and educationists of modern times, Swami Vivekananda has many layers to his perspective on education and its incorporation in the National Education Policy of India bears testimony to the significance held by his views.

2.1 A process of Self Development

Swami Vivekananda saw Education as a process of Self-development. In Vivekananda's view, Education is a process of self-development rather than the acquisition of facts or information from books. He asserts that just as a plant develops its nature, a child's education cannot be forced upon them. The role of the teacher is to guide and facilitate the unveiling of knowledge already present within the student. As the student's mind becomes active through the teacher's guidance, the cover of ignorance dissipates gradually and they move closer to gaining true knowledge.

Vivekananda's perspective on education emphasizes self-development and the realization of inherent knowledge within individuals. He criticized the contemporary education system, stating that mere book learning is insufficient. Instead, he advocates for a positive teaching approach that combines Western Science with Vedanta (a school of Hindu philosophy), guided by principles like Brahmacharya (celibacy) and Shraddha (faith in oneself).

According to Vivekananda, true knowledge does not come from external sources but is discovered within oneself. He compares the mind to an infinite library that contains all knowledge. The external world acts as a stimulus, prompting individuals to study their minds and rearrange their thoughts to make discoveries. For instance, he uses the example of Newton being inspired by the falling apple, which led him to uncover the Law of Gravitation by studying his mind.

Vivekananda's perspective aligns with the Indian philosophical tradition, which emphasizes the individual's quest for self-realization and the uncovering of inherent knowledge. This stands in contrast to the Western perspective, which often focuses on education as a means of adjusting individuals to their environment.

Swami Vivekananda's philosophy promotes the realization of one's divinity and the recognition of divinity in others. He emphasized the interconnectedness of all life and advocated for equality, social unity, and service to the underprivileged as integral aspects of spiritual and social upliftment.

2.2 Fulfillment of Swadharma

Vivekananda emphasized the concept of Swadharma, which means that each individual has a unique path of growth and should not imitate or copy others. He strongly criticized the imposition of foreign education, where individuals memorize the thoughts of others in a foreign language without truly understanding or internalizing them. He questioned whether this type of education could be considered true education.

According to Vivekananda, genuine improvement and self-development come from within. He believed that external pressure on children, such as forcing them to conform to specific standards or expectations, leads to destructive reactions, obstinacy, and indiscipline. Instead, he advocated for an atmosphere of freedom, love, and sympathy in which children can develop courage and self-reliance.

Vivekananda suggested that children should not be excessively restricted or checked in their activities. Constantly giving negative directions and telling them what to do can hinder their intelligence and mental development. Instead, educators should encourage children to stand on their own and be themselves. Vivekananda believed that if a child is not allowed to develop their unique strengths and individuality, they may end up becoming like a fox instead of reaching their full potential as a lion.

Therefore, Vivekananda proposed that education should be tailored to suit the individual child. Each child should be provided with opportunities to develop according to their own inner nature and unique talents. By honoring and nurturing their individuality, children can grow and thrive by their Swadharma.

2.3 Freedom of growth

Indeed, Vivekananda strongly advocated for freedom as an essential requirement for self-development. He believed that external pressure, restrictions, and impositions upon children hinder their growth and potential. According to Vivekananda, teaching a child is comparable to growing a plant. Just as a plant grows according to its own nature, knowledge also emerges from within the individual.

The role of the educator is primarily to provide assistance and remove obstacles that may impede the natural unfolding of knowledge and development.

Vivekananda metaphorically suggests loosening the soil around the plant, creating a conducive environment for growth. Similarly, educators should create an atmosphere that nurtures and supports the child's development, while ensuring that no external factors hinder their progress. By doing so, the educator's role is fulfilled, and the rest of the child's growth becomes a manifestation of their own inherent nature.

This emphasis on freedom in education aligns with Vivekananda's broader philosophy, which emphasizes the importance of individuality, self-reliance, and self-realization. By allowing children the freedom to grow and develop according to their own nature, Vivekananda believed that they would be able to express their unique potential and contribute meaningfully to society.

2.4 Character Formation

Vivekananda considered 'character' to be the solid foundation for self-development. He believed that education should aim at building character, which is the aggregate of an individual's tendencies and the sum total of the bent of their mind. As experiences of pleasure and pain leave impressions on the soul, they contribute to shaping a person's character.

According to Vivekananda, the cultivation of character depends on the ideals cherished by the individual. The educator's role is to present high ideals before the students. By setting a personal example of high character, the teacher becomes the best means of character development. Vivekananda emphasized that the personal life of the teacher is crucial in education. The teacher's character should be like a blazing fire, inspiring and guiding the students. Their living example serves as the highest form of teaching.

In the ancient Indian system of education, teachers would present high ideals to their students, who would then embrace and embody these ideals according to their own capacities. This process of transmission and initiation allowed students to internalize and manifest the ideals they were exposed to, leading to character development.

Vivekananda's approach underscores the significance of not only imparting knowledge but also focusing on the character formation of individuals. By emphasizing the role of high ideals and the personal example of the teacher, he highlights the importance of moral and ethical development alongside intellectual growth.

2.5 Humanism

Swami Vivekananda's Neo-Vedantism promotes the idea that individuals should strive to realize their divinity and assist others in realizing their own divinity. According to Vedantic philosophy, all life is interconnected, and the existence of an individual is not separate or independent from that of others. Vivekananda emphasized the oneness of all beings and encouraged individuals to perceive every person as a manifestation of the divine.

Vivekananda rejected the notion of inferiority or superiority among individuals or classes. He believed that the spirit of Vedanta, which recognizes the unity of all, fosters a sense of identification with the community and promotes service without personal gain. The happiness and existence of an individual are intimately tied to the happiness and existence of the whole.

Vivekananda asserted that individual liberation is incomplete without the liberation of all of humanity. He advocated for a belief in God and humanity, emphasizing the importance of helping those who are suffering and marginalized. His philosophy upheld the idea that a true belief in God or religion should bring comfort to the afflicted and provide sustenance to the needy.

For Vivekananda, the welfare of all is based on promoting freedom and equality. His concept of equality fosters fellowship and unity among individuals and nations. He stressed the importance of social unity for the social and economic upliftment of people. However, he believed that true unity is not merely a superficial construct but should be accompanied by a genuine desire to uplift and empower the underprivileged.

3. Vision of National Education Policy 2020

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 in India aims to cultivate well-rounded individuals who possess not only knowledge and skills but also moral and spiritual values, character, creative genius, innovation, leadership skills, sportsmanship, and teamwork. This aligns with Vivekananda's vision of education, which emphasizes the development of both mental and physical strength.

The NEP 2020 recognizes the importance of holistic development and seeks to nurture students into complete human beings. It emphasizes the integration of moral and spiritual values alongside academic knowledge and skills. This approach acknowledges the significance of character-building and the cultivation of qualities such as integrity, empathy, resilience, and ethical conduct.

The NEP 2020 also acknowledges the importance of physical well-being and sportsmanship. It encourages the promotion of sports and physical education as integral components of the education system which aligns with Vivekananda's emphasis on the development of both mental and physical strength, as he believed that a healthy body is essential for the overall well-being and growth of an individual.

By incorporating these aspects into the education system, the NEP 2020 aims to produce individuals who are not only academically proficient but also possess the necessary values, skills, and qualities to excel in various aspects of life, including leadership, creativity, innovation, teamwork, and sportsmanship.

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 in India aims to enrich and empower the uniqueness of every student. It recognizes that education should not be about restricting or limiting a student's potential but rather expanding and maximizing it. This aligns with Swami Vivekananda's perspective on education, which emphasizes the relentless pursuit of truth and the constant endeavour to improve the human condition.

The NEP 2020 acknowledges the diverse abilities, talents, and interests of students and seeks to provide an inclusive and flexible education system that caters to their individual needs. It emphasizes the importance of holistic development, promoting critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving skills.

The policy encourages a multidisciplinary approach to education, allowing students to explore various subjects and fields of knowledge.

The NEP 2020 embraces the idea that education should enrich and empower the uniqueness of every student. It promotes the relentless pursuit of truth, encourages holistic development, and aims to improve the human condition. This resonates with Swami Vivekananda's belief in the transformative power of education and the constant endeavor to expand one's potential.

4. Assimilation of Vivekananda's Philosophy in NEP 2020

Swami Vivekananda's philosophy of life centers around becoming fearless through struggle and serving humanity with peace. He emphasizes the importance of developing an individual who is not afraid of enemies and faces challenges boldly and confidently, without suppressing their true potential.

According to Vivekananda, real education is the one that prepares individuals for the struggle of existence. Education is seen as a tool of liberation from darkness and ignorance. Its purpose is to prepare individuals for social service, develop their character, and instill in them the spirit and courage of a lion. The process of teaching and learning involves the teacher guiding, suggesting, and pointing out, while motivating and encouraging students to explore and discover knowledge for themselves.

Vivekananda's philosophy of education is rooted in Indian nationalism and the principles of Vedanta and Upanishads. He criticized the contemporary education system that created individuals fit for slavery but lacking in true capabilities. He believed that the aim of education should be life-building, man-making, and character-building. Knowledge without culture was seen as superficial. Real education, in his view, not only develops character, mental powers, and intelligence but also instills self-confidence and self-reliance in individuals.

This is very much in line with the aim of education envisaged by the National Education Policy 2020 which believes in not only building character but also ensuring cognitive development thereby reating holistic and well-rounded individuals equipped with the key 21st century skills.

His views of knowledge is a deep-seated treasure have also been incorporated in the education policy. Vivekananda emphasized education for democracy and national development. He saw education as a powerful instrument to cultivate qualities and skills needed for individual and societal progress. The development of individuals through education was seen as crucial for the overall development and growth of the nation and has been given its due importance by NEP also which mentions that education helps manifesting the perfection which is already within an individual. (NEP, 2020)

5. Conclusion

By fostering an environment that nurtures the uniqueness of every student, the NEP 2020 aims to enable them to reach their highest potential. It recognizes that true education goes beyond rote learning and emphasizes the pursuit of truth, the development of analytical thinking, and the application of knowledge to improve the human condition. This aligns with Swami Vivekananda's vision, where education is not limited to the acquisition of information but is a transformative process that empowers individuals to understand themselves and the world around them.

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