

ANALYTICAL STUDY OF THE RELEVANCE OF SWAMI VIVEKANANDA'S NEO VEDANTA PHILOSOPHY AND HIS EDUCATIONAL THOUGHTS IN THE PRESENT EDUCATIONAL CONTEXT

Mrs. Ritu Rani¹, Sagar Singh Sirola²

¹Assistant Professor, Department of Teacher Education, M.S. Garg B.Ed. College Laksar Haridwar (247663), H.N.B. Garhwal Central University Uttarakhand, India.

E-Mail Address : ritukashyap.hw@gmail.com

²Research Scholar, School of Education, Department of Teacher Education, Lal Bahadur Shastri Government Post Graduate College Haldachaur, Kumaun University Nainital (263001) Uttarakhand, India. E-Mail Address :

sagarsinghsirola@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

The presented research article is based on the Neo Vedanta philosophy of Swami Vivekananda, which gives a brief analytical explanation of his educational ideas and the philosophy propounded by him in the educational context. Education is the supreme positive aspect of every society. Education is the element which transmits human knowledge to the next generation. In such a situation, what should be the real objective of education is the most important issue. In the educational context, the golden history of ancient India has been of idealistic nature. In such a situation, the name of Swami Vivekananda comes prominently in the field of education for his exemplary efforts made for the revival of the Indian education system. In the late nineteenth century, Swami Vivekananda was considered a leading figure in India who worked towards bringing large-scale social reforms in the society. He contributed and worked in the fields of secularism, compassion towards untouchables, educational reforms, socialism, women upliftment and many other areas. Swami Vivekananda considers the main objective of education to be a great person. According to him, education should be such that a person can develop reality, self-confidence, self-realization, feeling of unity, religious development and renunciation etc. Thus, Swami Vivekananda's educational ideas seem to be very compatible and relevant in the present context.

Key Words: Education, Philosophy, Vedanta Philosophy and Swami Vivekananda.

1. INTRODUCTION

Preamble

The literal meaning of the term Vedanta is 'the end of the Vedas' or 'the concluding part of the Vedas' or 'the culmination of the Vedic teaching and wisdom'. Thus the term is originally referred to the Upanishads, the last literary products of the Vedic period. Upanishads are the last part of Vedic literature, that is why they are called Vedanta. Vedanta philosophy is an ancient school of philosophy based on the sacred texts of Hinduism, known as the Vedas as well as the Bhagavad Gita. The Vedas are a collection of spiritual hymns and poems written in Sanskrit and were compiled between 1500–500 BCE, known as the Vedic period. The three branches of Vedanta that are most well known are: **Advaita Vedanta**, **Vishishtha Advaita** and **Dvaita**.

Adi Shankaracharya, Ramanuja and Madhvacharya are considered to be the originators of these three branches respectively. Apart from these, there are other branches of Gyan Yoga. These branches are known by the names of their originators which include Bhaskar, Vallabha, Chaitanya, Nimbarka, Vachaspati Mishra, Sureshwar and Vigyan Bhakti. Among the prominent Vedanta in modern times, Ramakrishna Paramhansa, Swami Vivekananda, Aurobindo Ghosh, Swami Shivananda, Swami Karpatri and Ramana Maharshi are notable. These modern thinkers represent the Advaita Vedanta school i.e. Neo Vedanta School.

1.2 Need and Importance of the Research Study

The name of Swami Vivekananda mainly emerges among the sages who dedicated their lives for the revival of education and society in India. On the basis of his philosophical, fulfilling thoughts and religious beliefs, he has worked to establish the fame of India at the highest peak in the world. According to Swami Vivekananda, "Education is to express the inherent perfection of man." The greatest contribution of Swami Vivekananda's thoughts has been in the education and social fields. He has given many religious sermons from scientific point of view and practical method. Swami Vivekananda always wanted to destroy the scourge of unrest with the great weapon of education. At present, Indian educational institutions seem to be saturated with western educational culture. As a result, today India is forgetting its

original civilization and culture. In Indian educational institutions, commercialism and indiscipline are becoming increasingly prevalent in place of community life. For this reason, gradual reform in the Indian education system is essentially necessary. In this regard, the complete solution of the above problems can be done effectively after assimilating the values and knowledge fund inherent in Indian philosophy. In this context, Swami Vivekananda, keeping in mind all the aspects of education, has given the main principles of education which seem to be very relevant in the then circumstances as well as in the present time.

2. OBJECTIVES OF THE RESEARCH STUDY

The objectives of the presented research study are as follows:

1. To study the Neo Vedanta Philosophy of Swami Vivekananda.
2. To study the spiritual as well as educational thoughts of Swami Vivekananda.
3. To study the relevance of Swami Vivekananda's Neo Vedanta philosophy in the context of current education.

3. METHODOLOGY OF THE RESEARCH STUDY

Under the presented research study, the relevance of Swami Vivekananda's Navya Vedanta philosophy and his educational ideas in the present context has been studied, which is completely based on philosophical background. So therefore, under the presented research study, on the basis of philosophical research approach, 'philosophical analytical research method, historical research method, descriptive research method, psychological research method and content analysis method' have been used.

1.5 Introduction to Swami Vivekananda's Neo-Vedanta Philosophy

It goes by different names like Hindu Modernism, Neo-Hinduism and Global-Hinduism. It is the pointed exploration of Hinduism with the aid of 19th century scholarship and an interpretation that has given it the attribute of universalism. It is not deviant from its central idea of Advaita Vedanta of Hindu culture. This idea was further promoted by Sri Aurobindo and Sarvapalli Radhakrishnan. It was spread as Neo-Hindu movement in the west. This term was used by different scholars to denote different connotations. The German Indologist, Wilhem Halbfass, claims that this term was coined by Bajendra Nath Seal, who characterized the literary works of Bankim Chandra Chatterjee as Neo- Vedanta. He further describes that the term includes the important developments and changes which took place in Indian Religious thoughts since 19th century. It was the period when India was yet to accept foreign/western influences and their concepts to redefine the traditional native ideas in the right of the imported wisdom of the west.

1.6 Features of Swami Vivekananda's Neo-Vedanta Philosophy

Hacker outlined two distinct characteristics of Neo-Hinduism—emphasis on ethics and on nationalism. He claimed that the ethical component that is so prominent in the ideas of Vivekananda and Radhakrishnan are derived from Western and Christian sources. In the case of Vivekananda, he even identified the precise moment of this transmission of ideas—he argued that Vivekananda borrowed the idea of the ethical implication of Vedanta in 1896 from the German indologist Paul Deussen (1845–1919), who in turn had assimilated this idea from the German philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer (1788–1860). Hacker called this the “pseudo-Vedantic tat tvam as ethic.” According to him, both ethics and nationalism are elements that are inconsistent with the scheme of traditional Advaita Vedanta. Social service, based on the idea that human beings are an embodiment of divinity, is, thus, viewed as a distinguishing aspect of Neo-Vedanta. The idea of the incompatibility of Advaita Vedanta and an ethics directed toward worldly welfare has been prevalent in academia for some time. There are many scholars who echo Hacker's views on Neo-Hinduism/Neo-Vedanta. Andrew Fort, for instance, writes that the exponents of Neo-Vedanta “are participating in and contributing to a new understanding of this Vedanta tradition, one influenced by Western premises and categories (imposed and chosen), which include humanistic globalism, the importance of egalitarian social ethics, and a focus on psychological experience”.

However, the underlying assumptions of such premises are problematic, and recently, there has been much criticism (discussed below) of these views. While for Hacker, the phenomenon of Neo-Hinduism was entirely a negative one, for some others, like Jeffery Long, Neo-Vedanta is a positive phenomenon, whose two predominant characteristics are religious pluralism and an emphasis on direct spiritual experience. Long clearly places the Bengali mystic Ramakrishna Paramahansa (1836–1886) and his disciple Vivekananda within a Neo-Vedantic pantheon. The claim of religious pluralism is an important and a largely valid claim that bears serious consideration. As regards the need for direct experience in spiritual life, it is true that both Ramakrishna and Vivekananda untiringly emphasized on it. However, it would be difficult to argue that this emphasis was absent in earlier traditions—the Upanisad themselves call for a first hand engagement with spiritual truths. Opinion, however, is divided if the later Vedantic philosophers, like Sankara privileged scriptural authority over direct experience. Other features attributed to Neo-Vedanta are an unorthodox position vis-à-vis the caste question and an emphasis on rationality and scientificity of religion.

1.7 Review of Spiritual and Educational Thoughts of Swami Vivekananda

Swami Vivekananda rebelled against the education system run by the British in contemporary India and worked to establish a national education system. He opposed the implementation of western education system and supported the adoption of education system in accordance with the culture of India. For this, he reinterpreted the Vedanta philosophy in a modern perspective and showed a new path of life to the Indian people trapped in the quagmire of despair and frustration. Swami Vivekananda believes that education can be explained as the development of power. The effort of cramming information into the minds of boys and girls should not be called education. On the subject of what is knowledge, Swami Vivekananda believes that knowledge is derived from within man, because man's own soul is the eternal source of knowledge. He has clearly stated that, "Education is to express the inherent perfection of man". Knowledge is a principle inherent in man. No knowledge comes from outside. Everything is within. All knowledge, worldly and spiritual, is in the mind of man. It remains covered by the casing. When this cover is gradually removed, the person learns something. As the process of learning progresses, man's knowledge increases. According to the Neo Vedanta philosophy of Swami Vivekananda, the desired objective of education is to reveal the inner strength of the individual, to develop the human being, to develop the physical development of the human being and to prepare for the struggle of life. Apart from this, he has also said that it is the duty of every educated person to walk on the path of liberation by providing education to lakhs of poor and helpless people.

1.8 Relevance of Swami Vivekananda's Neo-Vedanta Philosophy and his Spiritual Thoughts

According to the Neo Vedanta Philosophy of Swami Vivekananda, the highest goal of human life is Brahma Sakshatkar or Self-Realization, which is called attaining salvation in spiritual terms. The present social and educational system has distanced mankind from these ultimate ideals. Under its influence, there is considerable progress in a person's individuality and his momentary material prosperity, but this materialistic man is completely incapable of knowing himself, due to which he is unable to realize his correlation with the Supreme Almighty. For this reason, Swami Vivekananda has given maximum importance to the concept of Brahma (Supreme Almighty) under his Neo Vedanta Philosophy. According to Swami Vivekananda only that person can possess Brahma Vidya who has good values and who has studied Vedas and Upanishad well in this birth. Under Neo Vedanta, there is no difference between Jiva (Creature) and Brahma (Supreme Almighty). According to this philosophy, all outwardly visible differences are unimportant, any living being born in any nation is a part of the same Brahma from which the world is derived, hence all human beings in the world are members of the same family. So therefore, Neo Vedanta not only focuses itself on human relationships but also appears to point towards global brotherhood by developing a sense of unity among all living beings. Thus the need and relevance of the educational objectives as well as values of Neo Vedanta Philosophy is highest in the present social and education system. With its help, mutual love, harmony, mutual trust and brotherhood can be generated between individuals. As a result, many problems like separatism, terrorism, linguism, regionalism, casteism can be easily conquered.

4. RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

On the basis of the above research study, it can be concluded that the basis of Swami Vivekananda's public education is Vedanta philosophy in which the concept of equality has been derived. He has laid emphasis on spreading the principles of Vedanta to the people. He has talked about accepting every soul as Brahma and serving them. Today, when we talk about the many creatures that are disappearing from the world, we realize that there is definitely an error somewhere in human education, the result of which is seen in the form of killing of creatures in large quantities. To avoid such undesirable situations, changes have been made in many formal education systems of the world from time to time, but till now the expected success has not been achieved. So therefore, now it is an essential need of the present time to once again review the highest ideals of Indian Neo Vedanta Philosophy, which believes that there is a single Brahma in all living beings. When we, influenced by the ideas of Neo Vedanta and see the form of Brahma in all living beings, then the small diversity seen in them gets transformed into vast unity. Thus, according to Swami Vivekananda, the essence of all education lies in the knowledge of Brahma. Brahma is the real and perfect fact of life, hence the aim of education is to gain knowledge of this real and perfect fact.

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