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Swami Vivekananda's Views on Women

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Abstract:

Swami Vivekananda, the ideal speaker for Hinduism is known globally for his spiritual wisdom of Hindu religion. Swami Vivekananda, mostly known as a prophet for modern India, had some intriguing views on women. Throughout his life, Swami Vivekananda strived to uplift the plight of women. Swami Vivekananda was of the view that without the empowerment of women there is no possibility of the prosperity of the world. He gave an example that a bird need both the wings to fly, with one wing birds can't fly, both the wings are equally important. Vivekananda argued for equality of men and women. Swami Vivekananda is the first monk to uphold and do work for freedom and equality of women and realized the importance of women for the society as well as the nation. He identified that the ignorance of women was the main hindrance for the progress of India. He insisted that women should be put in the position of power to solve their own problem in their own way and this cannot be possible without education. He engaged throughout his life for the development of women education. In the post independent India, still women are suffering from many chronic problems such as physical, social, political, cultural, economical etc. Today we vividly feel the importance of women education. Women education will also help for women empowerment and make them strong and completely independent. In the present paper, attempts are being made to examine the thoughts and ideas of Swami Vivekananda on gender equality, freedom of women, women education and women empowerment.

Key Words: Equality, Freedom, Women Education, Women Development and Women Empowerment

Introduction: Swami Vivekananda was born to an orthodox Hindu family in Bengal 1863. From an early age, he displayed signs of great compassion and also the qualities of a natural leader. In a short life of 39 years, this great man conquered the entire world with his valuable messages. Many great personalities both in India and across the world were deeply inspired by Swami Vivekananda. Vivekananda particularly liked the rational reasoning of the West and was easily dismayed by many of the religious superstitions and the cultural decline that found in Indian society. Swami Vivekananda was a towering spiritual personality who awakened the slumbering Indian consciousness with his soul stirring vision of a dynamic spirituality. He is often viewed as the patron saint of modern India. The

condition of women during 19th century inspired Vivekananda to step forward and make reforms in the society. Swami Vivekananda's contribution towards the women empowerment is remarkable. He gave special reference towards women empowerment throughout his all works and views. He was a philosopher, a thinker, a social reformer and has great influence on India society. Swami Vivekananda's ideas are still relevant and can be applicable in modern society also. Since his childhood he was seeker of spiritual knowledge. He gave special reference on the importance of education of Indian women for the upliftment of society. Since centuries Indian women were only indulged in domestic activities, they were not encouraged to come out and to participate in nation building activities. It was happening due to lack concentration on the importance of women and underestimating women's ability. He has given his logical explanation that why there should not be discrimination in any field of society whether it is education or any other field by stating that "Atma- the soul has no sex, no caste, and no imperfection" When human soul does not have any differences thus caste, creed and sex-based classification of people is unfair. He was of the view that "If you don't allow one to become a lion, he will become fox. Women are a power, only now it is more evil because man oppresses woman; she is the fox, but when she is no longer oppressed, she will be the lion". He blamed Indian society for the deteriorating condition of women in India. Indian women were suppressed and dominated by man that's why despite of having ability and power she can't develop herself and change her condition. He also firmly believed once women will be given a chance or no longer under the suppression of man, she can attain maximum self-development and self-respect and can contribute in the process of nation building. He was of the opinion that "There is no chance of the welfare of the world unless condition of women improved". It is very important to develop both men and women equally to attain maximum development and welfare of society. He tried to explain his view with an example by stating that with one wing no bird can fly, both the wings are required and have equal importance. Similarly, to gain maximum welfare of society, empowerment of both man and women should be done without any discrimination.

Objectives:

In this paper an attempt is made to examine the following objectives:

1. Views of Swami Vivekananda on Gender Equality
2. Views of Swami Vivekananda on Freedom of Women
3. Views of Swami Vivekananda on Women Education.

Methodology: This paper is completely based on secondary sources. Secondary data are collected from various web sources and books.

Important Quotes and Views of Swami Vivekananda's on Women and Womanhood:

"The best thermometer to the progress of a nation is its treatment of its women."

"There is no chance for the welfare of the world unless the condition of women is improved."

"The idea of perfect womanhood is perfect independence."

“There is no hope of rise for that family or country where there is no estimation of women, where they live in sadness.”

“When people are discussing as to what man and woman can do, always the same mistake is made. They think they show man at his best because he can fight, for instance, and undergo tremendous physical exertion; and this is pitted against the physical weakness and non-combating quality of woman. This is unjust. Woman is as courageous as man. Each is equally good in his or her way. What man can bring up a child with such patience, endurance, and love as the woman can? The one has developed the power of doing; the other, the power of suffering. If woman cannot act, neither can man suffer. The whole universe is one of perfect balance.”

“If you do not allow one to become a lion, he will become a fox. Women are a power, only now it is more evil because man oppresses woman; she is the fox, but when she is no longer oppressed, she will be the lion.”

“Soul has no sex, it is neither male nor female. It is only in the body that sex exists, and the man who desires to reach the spirit cannot at the same time hold sex distinctions.”

Swami Vivekananda warned it is completely unfair to discriminate between sexes, as there is no any sex distinction in “*Atman (soul)*”; the soul has neither sex, nor caste nor imperfection. He suggested not thinking that there are men and women, but only that there are human beings”.

“If you better the condition of your women, then there will be hope for your well-being. Otherwise, you will remain as backward as you are now”.

“Our right of interference is limited entirely to giving education. Women must be put in a position to solve their own problems in their own way. No one can or ought to do this for them. And our Indian women are capable of doing it as any in the world”.

“The great Aryans, Buddha among the rest, have always put woman in an equal position with man. In the Vedas and Upanishads, women taught the highest truths and received the same veneration as men”.

“We should not think that we are men and women, but only that we are human beings, born to cherish and to help one another. Woman has suffered for eons, and that has given her infinite patience and infinite perseverance”.

“In India the mother is the center of the family and our highest ideal. She is to us the representative of God, as God is the mother of the universe. It was a female sage who first found the unity of God, and laid down this doctrine in one of the first hymns of the Vedas. Our God is both personal and absolute, the absolute is male, the personal, female. And thus it comes that we now say: ‘The first manifestation of God is the hand that rocks the cradle’.”

Swami Vivekananda's Views son Equality and Freedom: Vivekananda in his speeches often referred to the Vedas as the foundation of Hindu society, which were supposed to govern all aspects of Hindu life. He proudly told his audience that some of the greatest Rishis who were the ‘discoverers’ of the Vedas were women.

Reposing his faith in ancient Vedic literature, he claimed that women's freedom and equality were inherent within the Indic culture and that these values had been passed on through generations by the people of the Vedic era.

It was only the 'Aryan literature', amongst other literature available from the ancient times, which upheld 'freedom of women' and where women could be seen 'taking the same share as men'.

There is not one passage throughout the whole mass of literature of the Vedas which can be construed even indirectly as signifying that woman could never be a priest. In fact, there are many examples of women officiating as priests.

In his view, not only did the Vedic literature itself establish women occupying the most exalted place in the society but also the ancient lore attested to a robust intellectual tradition amongst both women and men.

A society that regarded Devi or Shakti as the soul-force of the universe surely had to place women on an equal pedestal with men, if not superior. This is also the reason why Vivekananda believed that a society's progress, well-being, and salvation lay with its women.

In line with the tradition of ancient Indic scholars, he viewed the relationship between men and women as being one of perfect equality:

"The ideal of womanhood centers in the Arian race of India, the most ancient in the world's history. In that race, men and women were priests, 'sabatimini [saha-dharmini]', or co-religionists, as the Vedas call them.

Although there was no second thought about it that women's status in Indian society had deteriorated over time, yet the ideals of freedom and equality were so deeply well-embedded in the cultural milieu that they hadn't eroded even after centuries of foreign domination and emasculation of the society, and the society was able to produce remarkable women even in the modern period.

According to him, the Indian society had not yet lost the plot. He was hopeful of women being capable of equipping themselves with the required resources to be able to actively contribute to the development of society.

About his contemporary times, he stated that: "Women in statesmanship, managing territories, governing countries, even making war, have proved themselves equal to men – if not superior. In India, I have no doubt of that. Whenever they have had the opportunity, they have proved that they have as much ability as men, with this advantage – that they seldom degenerate". They keep the moral standard, which is innate in their nature. And thus as governors and rulers of their state, they prove – at least in India – far superior to men. Even at the present day, we see women in India managing vast estates with great ability.

Important Quotes and Views of Swami Vivekananda on Women Education: Swami Vivekananda was of the opinion that education as the prime remedy to the social malaise faced by women. Education would surely help women in recovering their freedom and development. For him, education in itself was societal purifier and a driver towards its betterment. He was of the opinion that nothing can be done to improve the state of things

unless there is a spread of education first among the women and the masses. The uplift of the women, the awakening of the masses must come first, and then only can any real good come about for the country, for India. The main objective of his scheme of women education was to make women strong, fearless and conscious of their charity and dignity.

Swami was of the view that "Educate your women first and leave them to themselves; then they will tell you what reforms are necessary for them". He stated that "Our right of interference is limited entirely to giving education. Women must be put in a position to solve their own problems in their own way. No one can or ought to do this for them. And our Indian women are capable of doing it as any in the world"

The necessity of having educated women, and educated mothers, was in order to secure the future of the civilization, in so far as it was the mother who played the most crucial part in molding the character of the child. However, this should in no way be perceived as restricting the role of women to the domestic sphere. The Swami Vivekananda strongly argued for the education of women so that they could decide their own future. All societies and reformers were required to make education accessible to women. After that, they would be in a position where they would be capable of handling their problems on their own, they should be left on their own to chalk their way in life. Swami Vivekananda stated, 'true education' was the solution to all the problems faced by women, as it would truly empower them. Yet, he always had hope that India had the 'power of spirituality' within it, with which it would conquer foreign domination, and once again this land of great women would illuminate the western world with its treasure of spiritual knowledge.

Conclusion: The condition of women during 19th century inspired Swami Vivekananda to step forward and make reforms in the society. He gave special reference towards women empowerment throughout his all works and views. Swami Vivekananda's ideas are still relevant and can be applicable in modern society also. Swami Vivekananda felt, the thermometer to progress of a nation is its treatment of its women and it is impossible to get back India's lost pride and honour unless Indians try to improve the condition of women. He gave special reference on the importance of education of Indian women for the upliftment of society. Education of women is essential for all round development of the nation and also for the improvement of women's condition in India. Since centuries Indian women were only indulged in domestic activities, they were not encouraged to come out and to participate in nation building activities. It was happening due to lack concentration on the importance of women and underestimating women's ability. He has given his logical explanation that why there should not be discrimination in any field of society whether it is education or any other field by stating that "Atma- the soul has no sex, no caste, and no imperfection" When human soul does not have any differences thus caste, creed and sex-based classification of people is unfair. He was of the view that "If you don't allow one to become a lion, he will become fox. Women are a power, only now it is more evil because man oppresses woman; she is the fox, but when she is no longer oppressed, she will be the lion". He blamed Indian society for the deteriorating condition of women in India. Indian women were suppressed and dominated by man that's why despite of having ability and

power she can't develop herself and change her condition. He also firmly believed once women will be given a chance or no longer under the suppression of man, she can attain maximum self-development and self-respect and can contribute in the process of nation building. It is very important to develop both men and women equally to attain maximum development and welfare of society. He tried to explain his view with an example by stating that with one wing no bird can fly, both the wings are required and have equal importance. Similarly, to gain maximum welfare of society, empowerment of both man and women should be done without any discrimination. So, according to him, there is no chance for welfare of the world unless the condition of women is improved.

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