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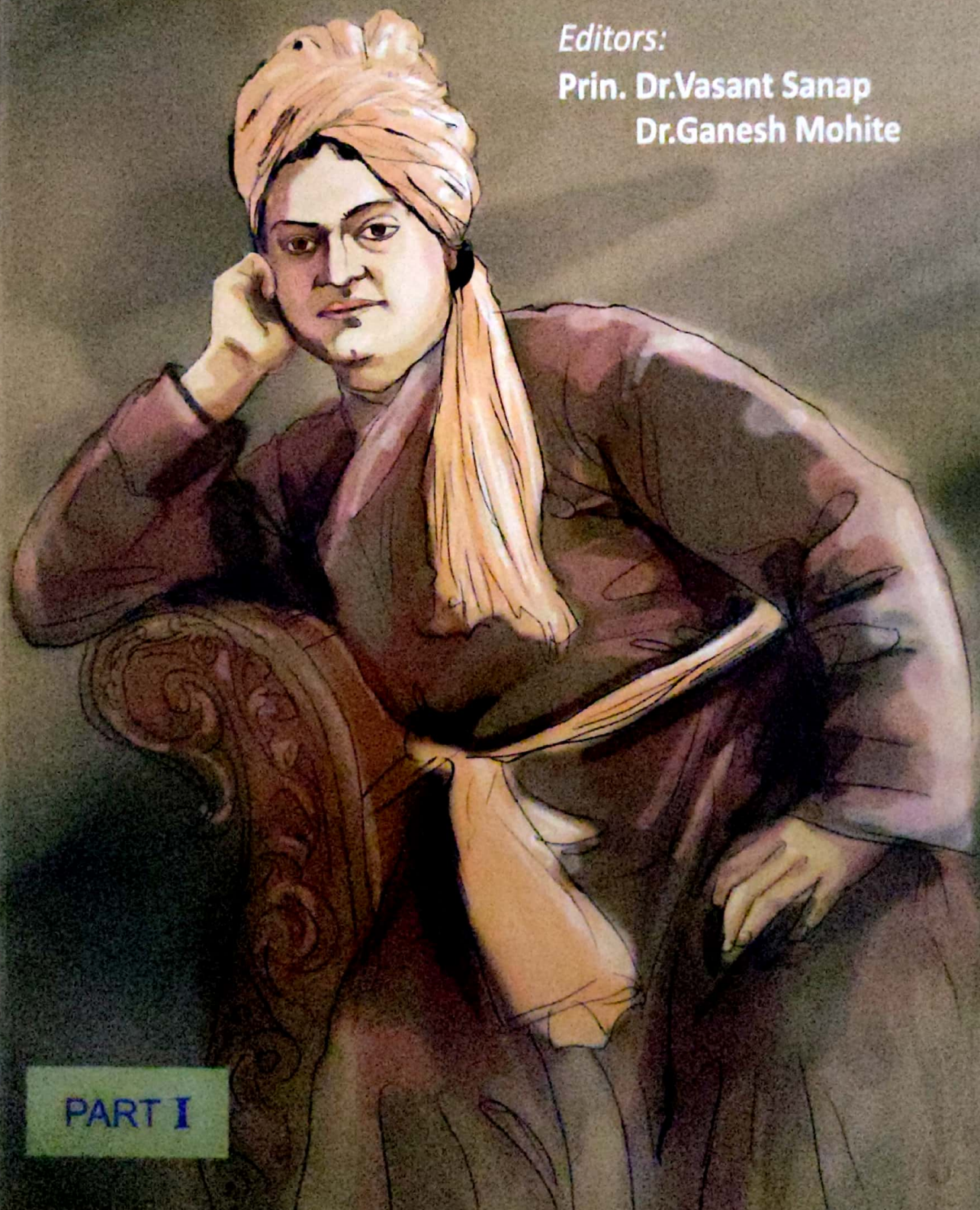
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Relevance of
Swami Vivekananda's
Thoughts in 21st Century

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PART I

Relevance of Swami Vivekananda's Thoughts in 21st Century

29. Awakening Of Youth By Swami Vivekananda
- Sunita S.Bhosle & Shyama Lomate | 147
30. Education in the Vision of Swami Vivekananda
- Dattatray Bobade & Archana Dhere | 153
31. Educational Thoughts Of Swami Vivekananda - Dahe B. R. | 157
32. Swami Vivekanand's Views on Education and Empowerment of Women - Deshpande M. M. | 161
33. Vivekananda and Religion - Dhaygude K. D. | 165
34. Swami Vivekanand's Educational Philosophy- Patil.V.H. | 169
35. The Role and Relevance of Swami Vivekananda's Man Making Education in Present Scenario - J. R. Bhadane | 172
36. Swami Vivekananda's Thoughts On Education
- Gaikwad S.D. | 178
37. Need of Thoughts of Swami Vivekananda in Indian Education System - S.E.Ghumatkar & Mr. G. E.Ghumatkar | 183
38. "Educational Aim's And Vision Of Swami Vivekananda's Educational Philosophy" - Jadhav M. B. & Dr. Pathan P.Y | 187
39. Globally Contribution of Swami Vivekananda
- Jagtap H. S. | 191
40. Swami Vivekananda's Views On Science And Education
- V. M. Jaysingpure & K.E.Chaudhary | 195
41. Swami Vivekananda's Thoughts on Education - Jyoti B. Kale | 199
42. Swami Vivekananda's Thoughts on Religions- R. K. Kale | 202
43. Swami Vivekananda's Thoughts on Buddhism
- Korde Rajabhau C. & Pawale Navnath D. | 206
44. Great contribution of Swami Vivekananda towards Physics
- Rupali B. Kulkarni | 210
45. Swami Vivekananda's Thoughts on Education - Lahoti R.K. | 213
46. Thoughts On Religion Of Swami Vivekananda
- M.B.Gaikwad | 215
47. Literature of Power: Reflections on Swami Vivekananda
-M. S. Bhatane | 218
48. Educational Philosophy of Swami Vivekananda
- A.R. Maniyar | 223
49. Educational Philosophy Of Swami Vivekananda: Some Reflections On Present Era - T. V. Munde | 225
50. Swamiji's Reflection on Women Education
- G.B.Kadam & N. T. Pawar | 230
51. Swami Vivekananda's Ideologies: Perspectives from Literature
- Dr. Navle B.A. | 236
52. Swami Viveknands Thoughts On Religions - P. B. Kharat | 242
53. A True Teacher and Vivekananda- R. K.Pardeshi | 244
54. Rethinking Swami Vivekananda on Women Education
- K. P. Paralikar | 248
55. Swami Vivekanand's: Educational Approach.- Patil M. S. | 251

Awakening Of Youth By Swami Vivekananda

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Introduction: The existence and significance of Swami Vivekananda is highly inspired for the youth. His writings amass in eight volumes of "The Complete Works" (CW) encloses several articles with a widespread and rousing message for the youth. It is exactly a hundred years ago that Swami Vivekananda achieved world fame by his historic address at the Parliament of Religious at Chicago which began from 11 September, 1893. As a spokesperson of the Hindu religion, he exhibited great self-possession and trustworthiness in his own religion, which is to be followed by all. The youth in particular, would be happy to know that in the afternoon of 11 September 1893, when the Chairman of the Parliament invited him to present his views and when he started his address with "Sisters and Brothers of America," it overtook the entire Parliament by a great storm of gusto. Throughout the whole Assembly, there was a immense thrill. Hundreds upon hundreds rose to their feet and sent up deafening notes of approbation over and over again. He could not believe that it was he they were applauding. Swamiji attempted to speak for over two minutes but the great enthusiasm of the audience prevented him and when silence was restored. Swamiji began his address. He quoted two beautiful passages from the scriptures of Hinduism. His speech voiced the spirit of the Parliament. Swamiji presented his speech on Hinduism on 19 September and stirred all people by his self-confidence and mastery of the subject and by going the universal message of Hinduism. This is a great lesson for the youth who feel shy in feeling proud of their own religion. In fact, Swamiji said, "Holiness, purity and charity are not the exclusive possessions of any Church in the world, and that every system has produced men and women of the most exalted character". Thus, Swamiji gave the message of universal religion of Vedanta as the universal religion by giving the slogan: "Harmony and peace and not dissension".

Swamiji's Respect for Parents : Swamiji believed that the youth should have immense respect for their parents and elders. He wanted the youth to show remarkable regard to their mothers. In fact, he felt that the place of the mother is premier in the world as it is the one place

in which one can learn to exercise the greatest magnanimity. His vision on parents is particularly to be noted by the youth who unfortunately, are increasingly contravening their parents. This is what Swamiji said: "Before parents one must not utter jokes, must not show impatience, and must not show rage or annoyance. Before mother or father, a child must bow down low, and stand up in their presence, and must not take a seat until they order him to sit". (CW-1, 43).

Non-violence: It is often seen that youth in particular become violent at times. What are required are toleration and the carry out the ethics of Ahimsa or non-injury to others. Swamiji's message to youth on Ahimsa is: "Never producing pain by thought, word, and deed, in any living being, is that is called Ahimsa, non-injury. There is no happiness higher than what a man obtains by this attitude of non-offensiveness, to all creation". (CW-1, 189).

Purity: It cannot be said that purity of character is one of the greatest virtues to be imbibed by all in general and the youth in particular. We should not see iniquity in others. It is said that we cannot see evil unless we see ourselves with an evil mind. Swamiji wanted the people to be virtuous and honest and to do gracious things. Here is the message of Swamiji: "Nothing is gained except by sacrifice...The holiest function of our human consciousness, the noblest, do not make it unclean! Do not degrade it to the level of the brutes ... Make yourselves decent men! Be chaste and pure!" (CW-1, 520).

Pure Food : It is often found that gradually more and more youth are turning away from pure and *satvic* food to impure and non-vegetarian food. It is contained in our scriptures that the nature of man is essentially vegetarian and the nature has made man essentially vegetarian. We should not kill or injure any animal for the sake of flavor or delight of the senses. If we want to be sacred in the true sense and believe that God permeates in all beings and exists in all, then we have no right to injure any creature and hence, eggs and other non-vegetarian food should be avoided. This is what Swamiji said on the question of food habits: "All exciting food should be avoided, as meat, for instance; this should not be taken because it is by its very nature impure. We can get it only by taking the life of another. We get pleasure for a moment, and another creature has to give up its life to give us that pleasure. Not only so, but we demoralize other human beings." (CW-4, 4).

Strength: The youth must pay attention to health and having strength of body, mind and character. In fact, religion comes afterwards. Swamiji always felt that the Gita can be understood with our biceps and

our muscles, a little stronger. He also said that the mighty genius and the mighty strength of Krishna can be understood by us better with a little of strong blood in us. Therefore, he wanted the youth in particular to be strong. Quoting the *Upanisads*, he said that it was the only literature in the world where we could find the word "Abhiih" (fearlessness) used again and again. The following message of Swamiji must be imbibed by every young person in the country: "Make your nerves strong. What we want is muscles of iron and nerves of steel, we have wept long enough. No more weeping, but stand on your feet and be men. It is a man, making religion that we want. It is man-making theories that we want. It is man-making education all round that we want." (CW-3, 224)

Youth in India : The youth of India have great creative energy with the positive potential to take them to spiritual heights. If human creativity is a special quality, then the "Never say die!" spirit is its apex. Demographically, today's India is at its youngest best and has the power to meet any challenge with the collective consciousness and effort of all people, especially young people. India has the largest youth population in the world; around 66 per cent of the total population (more than 808 million) is below the age of 35. Nearly 40 per cent of the Indian population is aged 13 to 35 years (defined as youth in the *National Youth Policy*). The median age in India in 2010 was just 25.2 years, compared to 34.5 years in China. The Indian labour force is set to grow by over 8 million per annum over the coming decade, most of which will be driven by youth entering the labour market. This is a major challenge for policymakers in terms of creating decent work for the increasingly educated cohorts. Good or bad times: youth more vulnerable to unemployment Globally youth are three times more likely than adults to be unemployed. Young women typically experience higher rates of unemployment than men. Young people around the world were hit hardest during the global financial crisis due to their precariousness in the labour market. 9.7 per cent of young men and 18.7 per cent of young women in India were unemployed in 2009/10. In comparison, the unemployment rate for Indians aged 30 - 34 reached only 1.2 and 3.4 per cent for men and women, respectively.

This is the perfect time when youth is alert and aware and provoked by the environment and lack of values. India is a nation facing incredible challenges. This is evident from the utter lack of safety and security for the girl child and women anywhere in the country and the impunity with which monstrous elements like rapists heap violence on girl children and women. On the one hand, people can see such huge wealth and on the other, more than one-third of the people go without a second

meal every day. We have examples of the very affluent as well as the extremely poor. And millions of our children have no access to education, even at the primary level. And we are still grappling with the issue of child labour. With 356 million 10-24 year-olds, India has the world's largest youth population despite having a smaller population than China, a latest UN report said on Tuesday. China is second with 269 million young people, followed by Indonesia (67 million), the U.S. (65 million) and Pakistan (59 million), Nigeria with 57 million, Brazil with 51 million, and Bangladesh with 48 million, the United Nations Population Fund's (UNFPA) State of the World's Population report said. It said that developing countries with large youth populations could see their economics soar, provided they invest heavily in young people's education and health and protect their rights. Within this generation are 600 million adolescent girls with specific needs, challenges and aspirations for the future, the report said. The report titled 'The power of 1.8 billion', said 28 per cent of India's population is 10 to 24 year-olds, adding that the youth population is growing fastest in the poorest nations. Global number of youths is highest ever. As the world is home to 1.8 billion young people between the ages of 10 and 24 year, 9 in 10 of the world's young population live in less developed countries. "Never before have there been so many young people. Never again is there likely to be such potential for economic and social progress. How we meet the needs and aspirations of young people will define our common future," the report said. PTI

The influence of Swami Vivekananda on the Indian Nationalist Movement is well known. Swami Vivekananda was not only a visionary or a monk but a nationalist and is former par excellence. For several decades the history of the British India has been a history of distortion, destruction and gross misinterpretation of the ideas and ideals of Indian thought and culture. Indian religions were branded as pessimistic and other worldly and it was thought that for Hindus the world was delusion and a snare and therefore there was no justification for improving it. Further during this period the Law of Karma was treated as fatalistic in character and there was not the least chance of improvement in character and the surroundings of the individuals, since everything was fore-ordained. It is against such backdrop that we have to access the contributions of Swami Vivekananda. Swami's knowledge of India based on his first-hand experiences was acquired during his wanderings throughout the country. His pilgrimages transformed him. He became a true lover of humanity and became endowed with the quality of *sarvabhutahite ratah* (being devoted to the welfare of all beings). The fallout of the Indian Mutiny of 1857 and the consequent patterns of racial superiority which the British

demonstrated in India as rulers resulted not only in resentment against the British but a critical evaluation of India's worth and sense of identity. At this time religious leaders like Swami Vivekananda felt that India would be given respect due to it as a country and civilization only if it asserted the richness, the philosophical depth and the diversities of its history and civilization. At this time Swami Vivekananda emphasized the need to reform Indian Civil Society on the basis of a rediscovery of India's historical traditions and value systems. He concluded that India had a message to give to the world at large in terms of the teachings of Indian religions, as also a moral framework for a world order. In his brief span of thirty-nine years, he imparted a dynamic impulse of self confidence and creativity to India in dealing with the external world. He became a disciple of Sri *Ramakrishna Parmahansa*, the great nineteenth century saint of Bengal, but soon added a socio-cultural mission to the pristine spirituality imparted to him by his guru. Vivekananda defined the objective of his life as that of strengthening the lives of the Indian people, both moral and physical, so that they could determine their own future.

In Swami Vivekananda's estimation, his Master fully harmonized the intellectual, emotional, ethical and spiritual elements of a human being and was the role model for the future. The high point of Swami Vivekananda's contribution in shaping India's attitudes towards other countries and societies came when he participated in the World Parliament of Religions held in Chicago in 1893. His main speech at this conference was so devoid of theology, dogmatism or religious rigidities that it was considered the most unique speech given by any delegate in the conference. Reflecting upon Swami Vivekananda's visit to America, Sri Aurobindo observed: "It was the first visible sign that India was awake, and she was awake not only to survive but also to conquer."

Conclusion: Vivekananda's view inspires the youth of India. With 356 million 10-24 year-olds, India has the world's largest youth population despite having a smaller population than China. It said that developing countries with large youth populations could see their economics soar, provided they invest heavily in young people's education and health and protect their rights. Within this generation are 600 million adolescent girls with specific needs, challenges and aspirations for the future, the report said. "Young people are the innovators, creators, builders and leaders of the future. But they can transform the future only if they have skills, health, decision-making, and real choices in life." Today's record 1.8 billion young people present an enormous opportunity to transform the future." UNFPA

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Executive Director Babatunde Osotimehim said. The potential economic gains would be realized through a "demographic dividend", which can occur when a county's working age population is larger than the population that is dependent.

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