

ABHISARAN

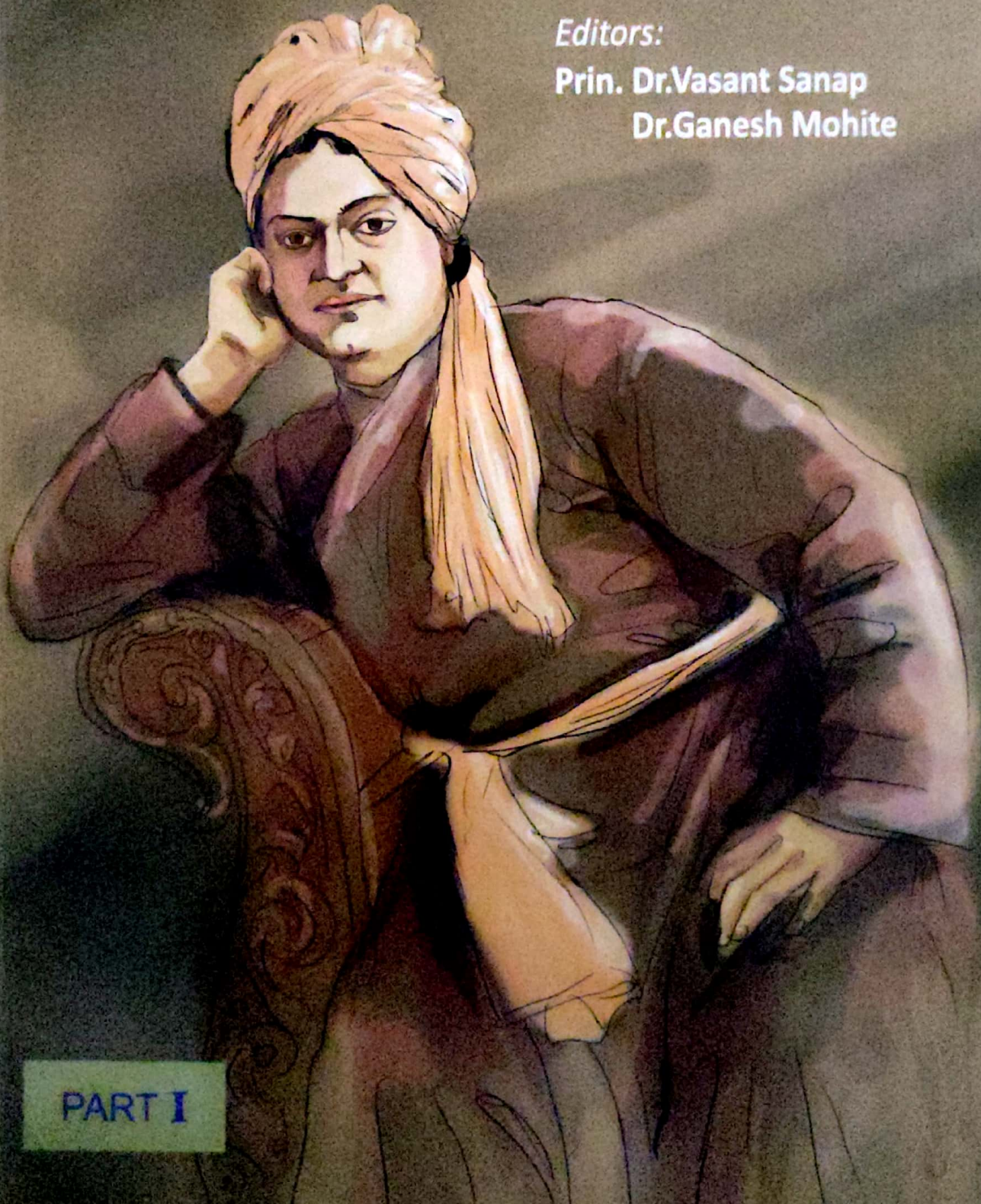
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Relevance of
Swami Vivekananda's
Thoughts in 21st Century

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Review On Thoughts On Education By Swami Vivekananda

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Introduction: The prime aim of education is to achieve fullness of perfection already present in a child. According to Swamiji all material and spiritual knowledge is already present in man covered by a certain of ignorance. Education should tear off that veil so that the knowledge shines forth as an illuminating torch to enliven all the corners by and by. This is meant by achieving fullness of the latent perfection. The second aim of education is the physical and mental development of the child so that the child of today, after studying Geeta, is able to promote national growth and advancement as a fearless and physically well developed citizen of tomorrow. Stressing the mental development of the child. Swamiji, wished education to enable the child to stand on his own legs economically rather than becoming a parasite on others. According to swami Vivekananda, a nation's greatness is not only measured by its parliamentary institutions and activities, but also by the greatness of its citizens. But the greatness of citizens is possible only through their moral and spiritual development. He also said that a nation's greatness is not only measured by its parliamentary institutions and activities, but also by the greatness of its citizens is possible only through their moral and spiritual development which education should foster. Swamiji character development is a very important aim of any education. For this, he emphasized the practice of Brahmacharya which fosters development of mental, moral and spiritual powers leading to purity of thoughts, words and deeds. All through his life Swamiji exhorted the individuals to keep full confidence upon their powers. They should inculcate a spirit of self surrender, sacrifice and renunciation of material pleasures for good of others. Education should fast, all these qualities in the individual. He gave this call to his countrymen. Arise, awake and stop not till the goal is achieved.

Importance of Education: Numerous are the quotes from Swamiji when the subject under discussion is education he called it the manifestation of inherent perfection; he called it the process of character-building; he wanted an all-round education which would develop the body, mind and spirit equally and simultaneously. In one context Vivekananda himself raised this question about education and provided a noteworthy definition: What is education? Is it book-

learning? No. Is it diverse knowledge? Not even that. The training by which the current and expression of will are brought under control and become fruitful is called education. It is obvious that here Vivekananda is making a clear distinction between literacy and education. And in this, he had the live example of his guru, Sri Ramakrishna, who was almost untaught but could be considered more educated than the renowned scholars of not only his but almost all times and climes. Therefore, when Vivekananda says, "you consider a man as educated if only he can pass some examinations and deliver good lectures". It is a clear warning about what education should and should not be, a warning which seems to have gone unheeded even after more than a century of its being articulated.

In an ironic vein he also said, "If education is identical with information, the libraries are the greatest sages in the world, and encyclopedias are the Rishis. Mere information or knowledge which is not pragmatic is not education, he said "Only that knowledge which matures into wisdom which inculcates the skills for living and the proper attitude to make the best of these skills should be the objective of education". Garnering his ideas as he said he had done from his extensive travels across India, Swamiji concluded that at the root of all misery here lay the lack of education. In a letter to Sarala Ghosal, he compared our situation with that of the educated west and said "Through education comes faith in one's own self, and through faith in one's own self the inherent Brahman is waking up in them, while the Brahman in us is gradually becoming dormant". In these and such numerous instances, Swamiji spelt out what education should do, what it is actually doing, what should be avoided and what should be encouraged as best-practices in the field of education. These quotes structure his ideas on what is positive and negative education.

According to Swami Vivekananda, the prime objective of education is spiritual growth and development. But this does not mean that he did not advocate material prosperity and physical well-being. He feelingly advocated the inclusion of all those subjects and activities, in the curriculum, which foster material welfare with spiritual advancement. For spiritual perfection Swamiji prescribed religious, philosophy, puranic lore, Upanishads, company of saints and their preaching's and for material advancement and prosperity he recommended languages, geography, science, economics, psychology, art, agriculture, industrial and technical subjects together with games, sports and other physical exercises. Swamiji prescribed the same ancient spiritual methods of teaching wherein the guru and his disciples lived in close association as

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in a family. The essential characteristics of those religious and spiritual methods were as under-

1. To control fleeting mental faculties by the practice of yoga.
2. To develop the mind by concentration and deep meditation.
3. To gain knowledge through lectures, discussion, self-experience and creative activities.
4. To imitate the qualities and character of teacher intelligent and clear understanding.
5. To lead the child on the right path by means of individual guidance by the teacher

Significance of child in Education system : Like Froebel, Vivekananda emphasized the education to be child centered. According to him the child is the store and repository of all learning material and spiritual. Like a plant a child grows by his own inner power naturally. Hence advising the child to grow naturally and spontaneously. Vivekananda asserted "Go into your own and get the Upanishads out of your own self". You are the greatest book that ever was or will be. Until the inner teacher opens, all outside teaching is in vain.

Place of teacher : Swamiji believed in self-education. According to him each of us is his own teacher. The external teacher only guides and inspires the inner teacher (soul) to rise up and start working to develop the child. Hence discussing the role of teacher Swami Vivekananda said—"Teacher is a philosopher, friend and guide helping the educand to go forward in this own way."

Education of Masses : In the times of swami Vivekananda, education was not available to the common people. It was confined to the well to do persons only. The poor, the miserable and the lowly placed used to starve and die for hunger. Swamiji yearned to improve the condition of the masses and thus advocated mass education as the only way to achieve any improvement in individual as well as society. Swamiji exhorted his countrymen to know—"I consider that the great national sin is the neglect of the masses, and that is one of the causes of our downfall. No account of politics would be of any avail until the masses of India are once more well educated, well fed and well cared for".

The teacher and the taught : Vivekananda often reiterated that in teaching, self help is the best help. According to him,

... men must teach themselves ... none can teach you. ... you have to teach yourself; your growth

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must come from inside ... There is no other teacher to you than your own soul." (Vol II; p 385)

But not everyone would be able to hone his/her own mind and soul to become teachers. For them he had another format of the teacher-taught equation. Anticipating in his usual forward-looking style, the concept behind a currently popular term—'facilitator' as a synonym for teacher—he said:

Do you think you can teach even a child? You cannot. The child teaches himself. Your duty is to afford opportunities and to remove obstacles. (ibid.)

The teacher is warned here: not to feel a sense of superiority but rather be humble—*vidya dadati vinayam*—a dictum which seems to have been overshadowed by a market-driven, exhibitionist culture. Instead Swamiji puts forward his views on what a teacher should and should not do by saying: "he [the teacher] ... [should] not teach with any ulterior motive, for money, or fame or anything else, but simply for love, pure love for you." (Vol IV; p.27)

Not for nothing has a teacher been deeply revered in our culture from time immemorial. But the custodians of education today need to do some serious introspection to assess how they measure up in this calibration of Vivekananda.

Of course, Swamiji's prescription is not for teachers alone. An ideal teacher would need a worthy pupil. As he suggests, "The conditions necessary in the taught are purity, a real thirst for knowledge and perseverance." (ibid. p. 24)

These three crucial requirements, if met, would certainly ensure excellence in education, irrespective of the curricular flaws, so to say. Since education is an exchange / interaction between the teacher and the taught, for a holistic perception, Swamiji describes the people, the process and the content involved,

The soul from which this impulse [to quicken the spirit] comes is called the Guru; and the soul to which this impulse is conveyed is called the disciple, the student. (ibid. p.22)

After defining the roles, he talks about the process:

In order to convey this impulse, in the first place, the soul from which it comes must possess the power of transmitting it ... to another, and in the second place,

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the object to which it is transmitted must be fit to receive it. (ibid.)

But even if the teacher and the taught are excellent, the content is also important:

The seed must be a living seed and the field must be ... ploughed. (ibid.)

This sums up the process of education and the role of its stakeholders which, if put into place today, would do marvels for the system.

Conclusion : Swami Vivekananda had great faith in education to him, this was the basic means for achieving human excellence and solving national problems. He said there are no problems which cannot be solved by that magic word "education". He defined education as the "development of faculty, not an accumulation of words". To him education was meant for the training of individuals "to will rightly and efficiently". He further said that the education that does not help the common mass of the people to equip themselves for the struggle for existence, which does not bring out strength of character, a spirit of philanthropy, and the courage of a lion, is not worth the name. Real education, to him, means that which enables one to stand on his own leg. Vivekananda stressed the need to educate the millions of our common people to revitalize Indian culture of the day. A nation is advanced in proportion as education and intelligence spread among the masses. National development rests upon the goodness and greatness of men, and goodness and greatness of men are determined largely by education. Education has not been able to make people think, to be individual, or to stand on their own feet—"Real education is that which enables one to stand on one's own legs" (Vol VII; p.148)—as Swamiji was repeatedly urging. Smug statistical data projects the quantity and not the quality of education. Social and global problems can directly or indirectly be traced to a malfunctioning system of education—not only in our country but in most other places too. But this dismal picture has a brighter side and this becomes visible when we wake up—and continue relentlessly till the goal of all-round education is reached. The roadmap to this goal is available in plenty in the thoughts of Vivekananda, waiting to be appropriated, implemented and benefitted from.

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