

Reflection of Swami Vivekananda's Views on Women Education in Current Scenario

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I. Introduction

Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902), a great philosopher, thinker and reformer of India, defines education as the manifestation of perfection already in man. To Vivekananda, education was not only collection of information, but something more meaningful; he felt education should be man-making, life giving and character-building. He states it emphatically that if society is to be reformed, education has to reach everyone-high and low, because individuals are the constituents of society. He was also emphatic that women must be educated, for he believed that it is the women who mould the next generation, and hence, the destiny of the country. In Vivekananda educational scheme for India, the upliftment of women and the masses received the highest priority.

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 honor unless Indians try to better the condition of women. He considered men and women as two wings of a bird, and it is not possible for a bird to fly on only one wing. So, according to him, there is no chance for welfare of the world unless the condition of women is improved. Education of women is essential for both all round development of the nation and also for the improvement of women's condition in India. But the magnitude of illiteracy among women is very high in India. 35 per cent of women are still illiterate as per 2011 census. It reflects that India is not utilizing the potential workers in a proper way. There is either unutilisation or under utilization of women's capacities and skills. Even though the education system expanded very rapidly, the gap between male and female literacy still persist.

Therefore, in this paper an attempt has been made to reflect the gender gap in literacy rate and highlight current policies formulated and implemented by the government to promote and foster the growth of women education in India. In the conclusion, this paper will suggest recommendations in consideration with Swami Vivekananda's vision, to overcome the problem of illiteracy among women in India.

II. Defining Education

Swamiji defines education as **'the manifestation of the perfection already in man'**. This implies that something already exists and is waiting to be expressed. According to him, knowledge is inherent in man, not acquired from external sources. Like sparks in a flint, knowledge is potentially there in human mind. The stimulus of education causes the friction that ignites the fire of knowledge. And refers to a human being's potential, which is the range of the abilities and talents, known or unknown that is born with. 'Potential' speaks of the possibility of awakening something that is laying dormant (Prabhananda, 2003). The word 'perfect' implies completion, or something being made whole. Again, we can see that every act connected with learning, training etc. is part of a process directed towards an end.

Swami Vivekananda also defines education as **"life-building, man-making, character-making assimilation of ideas"**, and not a certain **"amount of information that is put into your brain and runs riot there, undigested all your life"**.

Swami Vivekananda's views on Women Education:

Vivekananda also stresses the importance of women education. He explains the point about how female illiteracy retards the progress of a society.

"There is no chance for the welfare of the world unless the condition of woman is improved. It is not possible for a bird to fly on only one wing"

"Educate your women first and leave them to themselves; then they will tell you what reforms are necessary for them"

"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"

These golden quotes of Swami Vivekananda, explain how significant female literacy is. Unless the gap between males and females literacy is abridged, it is very difficult to steer and propel national development.

Vivekananda realized that right type of education is very important for females in our country because once they get right type of education they will be in a position to solve their own problems. He had suggested introducing subjects like sewing, nursing, culinary art, etc because he believed that women should be imparted training emphasizing skill enhancement. Then, his intention and focus was on vocational skills and training, the dynamics of which changes with time and technology and also way of living.

Vivekananda strongly believes that there is a huge difference in the attitude of Indian men and their western counterparts. Indian men believe that the women are born to please them. The real Shakti-worshipper is he who knows that God is the omnipresent force in the universe, and sees in women the manifestation of that force. In America men look upon their women in this light and treat their women as well as can be desired, and hence they are so prosperous, so learned, so free and so energetic.

The men and the women are the two wheels of the society. If one of the two falls defective, the society cannot make progress. Hence we need education for the females as we need for the males.

Constitution of India

The Article 21-A in the Constitution of India provides free and compulsory education of all children in the age group of six to fourteen years as a Fundamental Right in such a manner as the State may, by law, determine. The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act, 2009, which represents the consequential legislation envisaged under Article 21-A, means that every child has a right to full time elementary education of satisfactory and equitable quality in a formal school which satisfies certain essential norms and standards. The Article 15 of the Constitution of India prohibits any discrimination on grounds of sex (Constitution of India Article 15(1) (3)).

The Article 26 of Declaration of the Universal Declaration of Human Right declares:

“Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory. Technical and Professional education shall be made generally available and higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit.”

This Right is also repeated in the UN Declaration of the Right of the Child which seeks to ensure. “Right to Free and Compulsory Education at least in the elementary stages and education to promote general culture, abilities, judgment and sense of responsibility to become a useful member of society and opportunity to recreation and play to attain the same purpose as of education.”

III. After Independence:

After India attained independence in 1947, the University Education Commission was created to recommend suggestions to improve the quality of education. However, their report spoke against female education, referring to it as: "Women's present education is entirely irrelevant to the life they have to lead. It is not only a waste but often a definite disability."

In 1958, a national committee on women's education was appointed by the then government, and most of its recommendations were accepted. The crux of its recommendations was to bring female education on the same footing as offered for boys.

Soon afterward, committees were created that talked about equality between men and women in the field of education. For example, one committee on differentiation of curricula for boys and girls (1959) recommended equality and a common curriculum at various stages of their learning. Further efforts were made to expand the education system, and the Education Commission was set up in 1964, which largely talked about female education, which recommended a national policy to be developed by the government. This occurred in 1968, providing increased emphasis on female education.

Present Position of Women education in India

In Independent India, education acquired special significance and has been supported by the government from time to time through its policies and programmes. Therefore, in recent years the Education system has expanded rapidly. But still a large number of women are in dark and the gender gap in literacy rate remains startling by its presence. The following facts and figures throw light on the criticality of the problem which is a harsh reality and demonstrate that we have a herculean task ahead.

Table1: Literacy rates in India (1951-2011)

Year	Persons	Males	Females	Male Literacy rate	Female Literacy rate	Gap in Literacy rate
1951	18.33	27.16	8.86	18.30		
1961	28.30	40.40	15.35	25.05		
1971	34.45	45.96	21.97	23.98		
1981	43.57	56.38	29.76	26.62		
1991	52.21	64.13	39.29	24.84		
2001	64.84	75.26	53.67	21.59		
2011	74.04	82.14	65.46	16.68		

Source: Census of India (*Literacy rate for year 1951 relates to population aged 5 years and above.)

According to the census of 2011, "Every person above the age of 7 years who can read and write in any language is said to be literate". According to this criterion the Literacy Rate in India is around 74%.

Table 1 shows the Percentage of Literacy rates among males and females in India. The gap which was 18.30 per cent in 1951 increased to 25.05 percent in 1961 and 26.62 percent in 1981. After 1991, there was a slow decrease in the gap as the literacy rate among women started increasing gradually due to interventions taken by the government.

The Gap of 21.59 percentage points recorded between male and female literacy rates in 2001 census has reduced to 16.68 percentage points by 2011-12. The 2011 census report indicates that literacy among women as only 65.46 per cent which is much lower to national average i.e. 74.04 per cent. Gender inequality in education is proved by the fact that the literacy rate for the women is only 65.46% against 82.14% of men as per 2011 Census. Though there is tremendous increase in the female literacy rate after independence, the gap between male and female literacy rate is declining very slowly.

Table2: Ranking of States and Union Territories by Female literacy rate: 2011

Rank	India/state/Union Territory#	Female Literacy rate
1	Kerala	91.98
2	Mizoram	89.40
3	Lakshadweep#	88.25
4	Tripura	83.15
5	Goa	81.84
6	Andaman & Nicobar Island #	81.84
7	Chandigarh#	81.38
8	Puducherry#	81.22
9	NCT of Delhi#	80.93
10	Daman & Diu #	79.59
11	Nagaland	76.69
12	Himachal Pradesh	76.60
13	Sikkim	76.43
14	Maharashtra	75.48
15	Tamil Nadu	73.86
16	Meghalaya	73.78
17	Manipur	73.17
18	Punjab	71.34
19	West Bengal	71.16
20	Gujarat	70.73
21	Uttarakhand	70.70
22	Karnataka	68.13
23	Assam	67.27
24	Haryana	66.77
25	Dadra & Nagar Haveli#	65.93
26	Orissa	64.36
27	Chhattisgarh	60.59
28	Madhya Pradesh	60.02
29	Andhra Pradesh	59.74
30	Arunachal Pradesh	59.57
31	Uttar Pradesh	59.26
32	Jammu & Kashmir	58.01
33	Jharkhand	56.21
34	Bihar	53.33
35	Rajasthan	52.66
	All India	65.46%

Source: Census of India-2011

Table 2 shows Ranking of States and Union Territories by Female literacy rate in 2011. The female literacy rate had an average of 65.46% in all India basis in 2011 census the high literacy rate is 91.98% in Kerala and least literacy rate is 52.66% in Rajasthan in 2011 census. According to scholars, the major factor behind the improvement in the social and economic status of women in Kerala is literacy.

Table 3: Gender wise Literacy rate in Rural- urban areas

India	Rural			Urban			Total		
	Person	Male	Female	Person	Male	Female	Person	Male	Female
2001	58.74	70.70	46.13	79.92	86.27	72.86	64.84	75.26	53.67
2011	67.77	77.15	57.93	84.11	88.76	79.11	74.04	82.14	65.46

Source: Census of India 2001 & 2011

Table 3 compares the gender wise literacy rate in rural and urban area in 2001 & 2011. The literacy rate went up from 64.84% in 2001 to 74.04% in 2011 showing an increase of 9.21%. Female literacy in 2001 stood at 53.67%, it has gone up to 65.46% in 2011. The male literacy in comparison rose from 75.26% to 82.14%. The data shows that the improvement in female literacy is more than males in both rural and urban, during the decade 2001-2011 which represent women's are growing well in the last 10 years.

The gender gap in literacy has come down from 24.57 in 2001 to 19.22 in 2011 in rural areas and from 13.41 in 2001 to 9.65 in 2011 in urban areas. And the gap between the literacy rate in urban and rural areas is also declined from 21.18 percentage in 2001 to 16.34 percentage in 2011.

Factors Responsible for Low Literacy Rates among Women:

In spite of various plans and policies formulated and implemented by Indian govt. to eradicate illiteracy from our country, especially among women, the gap between male and female literacy still persist. In this context, the Factors responsible for low female literacy rate in India are identified and listed below:

- Gender bias in the curriculum (female characters being depicted as weak & helpless)
- Social discrimination and economic exploitation.
- Occupation of girl child in domestic chores.
- Low enrollment of girls in schools.
- Low retention rate and high dropout rate.
- Deprived of access to information and alienated from decision-making processes.
- Shortage of female teachers in schools.
- Schools established in faraway places etc.
- Inadequate school facilities (such as sanitary facilities etc).
- Rapid growth of population which leads to the neglect of girl child and put more emphasis on the boy education.
- women is considered as liability who will one time get married and will not contribute to the economic and social development.

IV. Current policies

Before and after Independence, India has been taking active steps towards women's status and education. The 86th Constitutional Amendment Act, 2002, has been a path breaking step towards the growth of education, especially for females. According to this act, elementary education is a fundamental right for children between the ages of 6 and 14. The government has undertaken to provide this education free of cost and make it compulsory for those in that age group. This undertaking is more widely known as Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA).

Since then, the SSA has come up with many schemes for inclusive as well as exclusive growth of Indian education as a whole, including schemes to help foster the growth of female education. The major schemes are the following:

- **Mahila Samakhya Programme:** This programme was launched in 1988 as a result of the New Education Policy (1968). It was created for the empowerment of women from rural areas especially socially and economically marginalized groups. When the SSA was formed, it initially set up a committee to look into this programme, how it was working and recommends new changes that could be made.
- **Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya Scheme (KGBV):** This scheme was launched in July, 2004, to provide education to girls at primary level. It is primarily for the underprivileged and rural areas where literacy level for females is very low. The schools that were set up have 100% reservation: 75% for backward class and 25% for BPL (below Poverty line) females.
- **National Programme for Education of Girls at Elementary Level (NPEGEL):** This programme was launched in July, 2003. It was an incentive to reach out to the girls who the SSA was not able to reach through other schemes. The SSA called out to the "hardest to reach girls". This scheme has covered 24 states in India. Under the NPEGEL, "model schools" have been set up to provide better opportunities to girls.

The very first step towards women education and empowerment is to achieve the desired literacy rate. At the same time a notable reconsideration needs to be made regarding imparting an enhancement of certain vocational skills as visualized by Swami Vivekananda.

V. Recommendations:

Some recommendations to promote and foster the women's education in India:

- Involving women's group like self help groups to promote women's literacy.
- Providing free and compulsory education for all girls up to 20 yrs.

- Establishment of more no. of primary school.
- Bringing out change in the attitude of parents and in the society.
- Removal of gender bias in the school curriculum.

VI. Conclusion

Swami Vivekananda rightly pointed out that unless Indian women secure a respectable place in this country, nation can never march forward. Swami said, the progress of a nation depends on its treatment of women. And it is impossible to get back India's lost pride and honor unless they try to better the condition of women. So, according to him, there is no chance for welfare of the world unless the condition of women is improved. It is one of the foremost concerns of the Government of India as well as of the society at large. It is Due to the fact that at the present time, the educated women play a very significant role in overall development and progress of the country. India is now optimistic in the field of women education.

After Independence, Women education acquired special significance and has been supported by the government from time to time through its policies and programmes. Planners and policy makers have recognized that education can bring a reduction in inequalities and functions as a mean of improving their status within the family, society and nation. In spite of various committees created and plans & programmes executed by the government to promote women education, still a gender gap in literacy rate is existent. No doubt, this gender gap is gradually getting reduced but still, female illiteracy rate is 35%, as per the data given by census of India 2011. Keeping this in view the plan and programme of action has to be formulated and implemented in the future to reach the target of maximum women literacy rate and propel the progress of nation.

Swami Vivekananda's Vision on women education and Today's mission of eradicating gender gap in literacy rate both indicate one goal....progress...progress of women and thereby the progress of entire nation. -----
"Many paths, one goal"

"Arise, Awake & Stop not still the goal is reached"

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