



## **Swami Vivekananda's thought on Education Women- Embodiment of Shakti**

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### *Abstract*

*Swami Vivekananda views woman exactly as he views man, an individual with a destiny. In the sphere of the pursuit of spiritual realization, woman as well as man has to walk in a single file. Woman like man must be allowed to enjoy perfect freedom, independence and responsibility. Swami Vivekananda is the first monk to uphold and do work for the freedom and equality of women and realizing her importance for the proper functioning of home and society. Swamiji believed that the main reason behind the various problems of the women of our country was due to lack of proper education. Swamiji firmly believed that if the women get proper education then they solve their own problems in their own ways and they must also understand what chastity means, because it is their heritage.*

**Key words:** Swamiji, women, mother, education, chastity.

### **Introduction:**

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.<sup>1</sup>

Is there any sex-distinction in Atman (Self)? Out with the differentiation between man and woman- all is Atman!\*

India of the Vedas entertained a great respect for women amounting to worship. But during the time of Swami Vivekananda, the condition of women in Mughal-ruled and British-ruled India was deplorable. Swamiji said, "It is very difficult to understand why in this country so much difference is made between man and women, whereas the Vedanta declares that one and the same conscious self is present in all beings. You always criticize the women, but what have you done for their uplift?"<sup>2</sup>

Swami Vivekananda was of firm belief that women should be put in positions of power to solve their problems in their own way. The welfare of the world is dependent on the improvement of the condition of women.

Swami Vivekananda repeatedly viewed that India's downfall was largely due to her negligence of women. The great images of Brahmavadinis like Maitreyi and Gargi of the Upanishads age and women missionaries like Sanghamitra carrying Lord Buddha's message to Syria and Macedonia, all were laying buried deep due to millennium of foreign donations. The mid-nineteenth century India saw women, the great mother-power shackled and degenerated to mere "child producing machines" as Vivekananda saw it.

Swami Vivekananda views woman exactly as he views man, an individual with a destiny. In the sphere of the pursuit of spiritual realization, which is the highest reach of the life, woman as well man, has to walk in a single file. Perfect, freedom independence and responsibility are involved in the individual, be it man or woman who longs for God alone. Vivekananda declared that Western ideal of womanhood is wife, while the eastern ideal, and is that of the mother. "In India the mother is the center of the family and our highest ideal. She is to us the representative of the 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."<sup>3</sup> Swamiji said. Swamiji further declared "The ideal of womanhood in India is motherhood- that marvelous, unselfish, all suffering ever forgiving mother."<sup>4</sup>

Swamiji believed that the main reason behind the various problems of the women of our country was due to lack of proper education. So what was the way out to save and elevate Indian women? Education was the answer. They (women) have many grave problems, but none that are not to be solved by the magic word 'education'.<sup>5</sup> But what kind of education? What is women's education? Swamiji observed that. "To make a beginning in women's education: our Hindu women easily understand what chastity means, because it is their heritage. Now, first of all, intensify that ideal within them above everything else, so that they may develop a strong character by the force of which, in every stage of life.....they will not be in the least afraid even to give up their lives rather than flinch an inch from their chastity."<sup>6</sup> He further viewed that, "Along with that they should be taught sciences and other things which would benefit, not only to them but to others as well, and knowing this they would easily learn these things and feel pleasure."<sup>6</sup> Sister Christine wrote that for weeks and months Vivekananda would be buried in thought, creating and recreating the splendid image of the Indian woman of the future. Would a combination of the western spirit of independence, freedom and dynamism with Indian austerity, purity and chastity in woman's life be possible?

Swami Vivekananda defended the marginalization of women and empowering women and the poor a priority of Ramkrishna Mission. He visited England in 1895 and met Margaret Elizabeth Noble, an Irish lady who was in the midst of learning about the Buddha. Influenced by Swami Vivekananda's teaching she became the first Western woman to be a sanyasini named Bagini Nivedita. Nivedita played a major role in promoting the rights of women in rural India. In November 1898, according to Swamiji's instruction, she started a school for girls, allowing them basic education. The school is today known as Ramakrishna Sarada Mission Sister Nivedita Girl's School, situated in Bagbazar in North Kolkata.

A nation that has educated itself to look upon God as mother has learnt to invest its view of woman with the utmost tenderness and reverence. Swami Vivekananda is the first monk to uphold and do work for the freedom and equality of women and realizing her importance for the functioning of home and society.

Swami Vivekananda glorified Indian women of the past for their achievements as leaders in various walks of life. “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 to the moral standard, which is innate in nature. And thus as governors and rulers of their state, they prove- at least in India far superior to men”. John Stuart Mill mentions this fact.<sup>8</sup> India’s reverence for women as the symbol of chastity brought such words from Vivekananda’s lips:”I know that the race that produced Sita – even if it dreamt of her- has a reverence for woman that is unmatched on the earth.”<sup>9</sup>

Any attempt to modernize our women, if it tries to take our women away from the ideal of Sita, is immediately a failure, as we see everyday. The women of India must grow and develop in the footprints of Sita and that is the only way<sup>10</sup>

The rise of outstanding women administrators, statesmen, scientists, writers and spiritual teachers, is gradually proving the truth of these prophetic words. Today Swami Vivekananda’s words have proved true. Following the footsteps of Sarada Devi and Sister Nivedita hundred of women all over the world are coming forward with a combination of the’ mother’s heart and the hero’s will,’ a combination of the purity of Holy Mother and the dynamism of Rani of Jhansi or Joan of Arc.

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<sup>1</sup> CW: 5 pg 412

<sup>2</sup> CW: 7 pg 214

<sup>3</sup> CW: 2 pg 506

<sup>4</sup> CW: 8 pg 58

<sup>5</sup> CW: 5 pg 231

<sup>6</sup> CW: 5pg 342-343

<sup>7</sup> CW: 5 pg 342-343

<sup>8</sup> CW: 9 pg 200-201

<sup>9</sup> CW: 5 pg 231

<sup>10</sup> CW: 3 pg 255-256

\*Letters of Swami Vivekananda. May, 1976.

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