

Vivekananda's View on Women's Status in Society and Women's Freedom



Uttam Adhikary

Lecturer

Bidhan chandra College, Kankinara, North 24 Pargana's (West Bengal)

Abstract

Swami Vivekananda was one of the great personalities of the nineteenth century who had incisive views on women's status in society and their freedom . Swami Vivekananda's word can instill unbounded strength and courage in the hearts of women who have been struggling to find a way out of their present predicament . According to Vivekananda women occupy the central place in human society. Vivekananda believed that "there is no hope for the rise of that family or nation where there is no estimation of women, where they lives in sadness". In twenty first century India developed in many sphere but crime against women has day by day increased. So, to solve this problem needs right ideology, which would come from Vivekananda's idea. Vivekananda wants to revive the Vedantic ideology. It was the Vedanta philosophy that was to be the basis of equality between man and woman. He was not against of modern science but not if it must be at cost of purity. He always placed purity and chastity above mere intellectual attainments. For him nothing was greater than purity and no compromise was permitted in this matter .One hundred and fifty years after Vivekananda's birth if stand and look back to review the condition of women yes ,women power is awakening but awakened power needs to be channeled in the right direction ,that is found in viveknanda' s teachings.

In nineteenth century there were two main trends of social and political thoughts in India. one was directed towards reformation and inculcation of individualism of the Indian society under the impetus of western liberal values. Raja Rammohan Roy was one of the representative figure of this trend. The second trend of thought was oriented towards revivalism of Indian tradition and culture in the matter of social reforms. Swami Vivekananda was one of the founders of this trend. Rammohan and his followers believed that Hinduism and Hindu fundamentalism and its ritualistic regulations and rules are the main reasons for all the weakness and injustice of the Indian Society . That is why they emphasised upon the importance of religious reformation as the primary steps towards social reformation . On the other hand, Vivekananda chose the spiritual path .

Vivekananda's thought can direct us to a path of light. The status of women today is one of the sub- ordinations to men – a continuation of the degenerate legacy of the past millennium. The solution to this problem lies in the right ideology given to us and the right self images and identities of both women and men as Swami Vivekananda had observed more than hundred years ago In India there are two great evils – Trampling on the women and grinding the poor In this paper our main topic of discussion will be Vivekananda's view on women's position in society and women's freedom. Women's everywhere have suffered for ages from the disabilities and violations perpetrated by men. This issue has been studied and researched from various angles by scholars and thinkers all over world. Swami Vivekananda was one of the

great personalities of the 19th century who had incisive views on this matter. Today our society is changing at breakneck speed and the resultant confusion in values that it has engendered has taken the lives of men and women to the depth of despair. In recent time crime against women are seen to have risen to a shocking extent. According to Vivekananda "The best thermometer to the progress of a nation is its treatment of its women"¹. What is status of the women in Indian society? How can their ill treatment be stopped? How can they attain true freedom? There is an urgent need to review the situation and for that we need the light coming from the readings of Swami Vivekananda.

Women enslaved: Past and present

In the ancient Vedic times women in India were equal to men in every sphere and held a position of equal dignity and respect. In Vedic or Upanishadic age Maitreyi, Gargi and other ladies of revered memory have taken the place of Rishis through their skill in discussing about Brahman². Not only in the spiritual field, women had chalked out for themselves a distinguish in place even in the secular areas. But with the passage of time owing to social political blurring of right ideology resulting in degeneration of values, women began to lose their due place and were relegated to a lower position. The trend continues through the millennia. In the past few centuries their status had plummeted to an all time low. The degeneration that way seen in the status of women in the recent history of India was owing to several social political factors. The worst of its kind existed in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Vivekananda also came at that time when the status of the women had fallen into the abyss of degeneration. Child marriage, polygamy, sati, no right for widow to remarry, no right to education and a horde of other disabilities imposed on the womenfolk by the repressive patriarchy had stifled the very source of well being of our society. The intolerable burden of devilish local customs, structures and usages, blindly followed for centuries, had nearly crushed the womenfolk of the country, leaving them to be more child – bearing machines.

Discrimination against girl child was rampant then, the boy child always setting a better deal. The female was to grow up always depending on a male in every stage of her life. Blind depending on the male had become her religion, turning her into a helpless lot.

In recent times, throughout the country there has been a sleep rise in crimes against women – rape, molestation eve teasing, stalking, brutal assault etc. One of the traits in women enslavement is their wide spread coming deification through media. It was not only trait but also the cause of enslavement through this women are deluded into the belief that they are being accorded their rightful place in the world of glamour and lucre, but actually they became the captives of the male dominated society. A careful study of the presentation of women in the media will reveal that women are most of the time shown in subordinate, subservient male pleasing role.

The way to women's upliftment

Women occupy the central place in human society. Vivekananda believed that, there is no hope for the rise of that family or nation where there is no estimation of women, where they lives in Sadness"³ Never forget he would say, "the word is women and the people";⁴ the two things that possessed Vivekananda imagination was the upliftment of women and masses". Through his deep insight he saw that the success in the former was the key to the success in the latter. If India and the world have to rise, it has to be through women. "For this reason said Vivekananda repeatedly they have to be raised first"⁵

What did he mean by raising the women? He had a clear view on this subject. He said."Any attempt to modernize our women, if it tries to take our women away from that 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".⁶ Trying to make women modern outside of this mould of Sita has been the bane of our present. Day education and socio-cultural strivings. Every

single problem that our women face today can be traced to their attempt to jump out our age- old spiritual inheritance of women was, for him, the true development of human race. His views on women have been of a revolutionary kind. The stress he laid upon was on recapturing of the Sita ideal or the vedic ideal of womanhood in the modern setting.

Everywhere in the world equality between man and woman had been heretofore sought in some legislation or external factors. But Vivekananda marks the beginning of a ground shift in the equation of gender in a new way, or rather in a new way, or rather in a revivalist way, reviving the ancient vedantic view of human beings. Hence forth the equation had to be drawn based on the divine core of both the sexes, expressing as "equality." In the absence of this core shift in the way men and women look upon to each other, equality based on mere legislation and external factors is bound to fail, as is clearly seen everywhere. Vivekananda was assure, "I shall not rest till I root out this distinction of sex. Is there any sex distinction in the atman? Out with differences between men and women all is atman"⁷ It was the Vedanta philosophy that was to be the basis of this equality.

Women's education Vivekananda had experienced the glory of the divine in its feminine aspect during tutelage under Sri Ramkrishna. Resultantly, for him women were the condensed forms of that all powerful feminine. In his view the only thing needed was to awaken this awareness in the womenfolk, and the rest would be easy. This is what constitutes true education of the women, by which character is formed, strength of mind is increased, the intellect is expanded and by which one can stand one's feet" with such an education he believed women will solve their own problems. They have all time been trained in helplessness, servile dependence on others, and so they are good only to weep their eyes out at the slightest approach of mishap or danger. Along with other things they should acquire the spirit of valour and heroism. In the present day it has become necessary for them also to learn self- defence.

Vivekananda's view of education itself was quite revolutionary. The modern women have their intellect stuffed with information, but for Vivekananda this mattered very little. He always placed purity and chastity above mere intellectual attainments. For him nothing was greater than purity and no compromise was permitted in this matter. While in New York he once said, "I should very much like our women to have your intellectuality, But not if it must be at the cost of purity. I admire you know but I dislike the way that you cover what is bad with roses and call it good. Intellectuality is not the highest good. Morality and spirituality are the things for which we strive. Our women are not so learned, but they are more pure"⁸. For him, the ideal of women could not be separated from the ideal of chastity and sacredness. "To make a beginning in women's education" he said" our Hindu woman easily understands what chastity means, because it is their heritage.

Now first of all, intensify that idea."⁹ And as in past age true education to be based on brahmacharya and spirituality such training used to be equally imparted to both the sexes. Vivekananda wanted modern women also to be educated similarly in the line of brahmacharya and spirituality. Which alone could make them truly independent? He was not against of modern science; He said, "Modern science, women must learn but not at the cost of ancient spirituality."¹⁰ For him the chastity of women was paramount, no matter whether she is married or unmarried. His ideal form of education aimed to "intensify that ideal of chastity within them above everything else, so that they may develop strong character by the force of which, in every stage of life, whether married or single, if they prefer to remain so, they will not be in the least afraid even to give up their lives rather than flinch an inch for their chastity."¹¹

In his view, the future women would be the fusion of the soft and pure heart of a mother and a hero's will. He visualized them to be the very embodiment of strength. One hundred and fifty years after vivekananda's birth we stand and

look back to review the condition of women. Yes, women our is awaking but awakened power needs to be channeled in the right direction. That direct for present day women's struggle towards freedom is founding Vivekananda's teachings. And as more and more women , so also men , take to it , they will became the pillars of the future glorious society where women will be free in the true sense of the term .

References

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