

Swami Vivekananda's Philosophy of Women Empowerment: A Social Philosophical Analysis

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Abstract

The term 'Feminism' refers to the establishment of uniform rights and opportunities to woman along with man. The philosophy of feminism is an attempt to analyse various topics of feminism through the application of philosophical methods. In India, womanhood was celebrated and they had an illustrious and renowned position during the Vedic age. It describes women as longing for the everlasting and undying knowledge. In Indian tradition, women are regarded as Shakti. She is an epitome of endless and infinite powers and energy. But, during the post – Vedic era, women began to lose their dignity. Swami Vivekananda was a spiritual leader and a social reformer. He forwarded the ancient Indian teachings of Vedanta to the West. The present paper is an attempt to sketch an outline of Swami Vivekananda's thoughts and ideals of womanhood. He considered woman as the guardian of the spiritual heritage of India. He believed that woman should be honored and valued for the prosperity upliftment of a society. This article is a humble effort to get glimpse of Swamiji's views on womanhood.

Keywords: Swami Vivekananda, womanhood, spirituality, emancipation, education, women empowerment

Introduction:

In simple language, Philosophy refers to the criticism of life and experiences. When we discuss the various aspects of human life and experiences in light of philosophical standpoint, it can be considered as social philosophy. The social thoughts in India emerged as an outcome of critical reasoning of our ancient seers. They used to reflect upon experience and learning. According to early Indian literature, womanhood was celebrated and they enjoyed a respectable position. For the *Vedas*, nature is *Aditi*, she is the mother of Gods and men. But, unfortunately, the devaluation of women began in the post *Vedic* era.

Swami Vivekananda was a great philosopher, a thinker, social reformer, spiritual leader, and a *Karma yogi*. Through his works, views and speeches Swami Vivekananda gave remarkable contributions towards Women Empowerment. He believed that, for the complete development of a country, the progress of women

is highly required. Women should be treated as uniform to man by ensuring equal opportunities for their growth and self - establishment. His explanation for the importance of upliftment of women is based on logic. He stated- 'Atma - the soul has no sex, no caste and no imperfection' (Vivekananda, 1953a).

Swami Vivekananda believed that to fly, a bird requires both the wings. Likewise, both man and women have equal importance for the maximum development of a society. For the attainment of divine union in a nation, women empowerment is the first and foremost step. It would make the world more just and fairer. Swamiji thought women can do their activities much better than man. Any nation can achieve greatness by worshiping women and giving honour to their dignity.

Swami Vivekananda's notion of Women Empowerment:

The Vedanta philosophy thought no one is born superior to another. Being the pioneer of Neo - Vedanta, Swami Vivekananda stated that 'We should not think that we are men and women, but only that we are human being, born to cherish and to help one another' (Vivekananda, 1953b).

Swamiji's philosophy of feminism is briefly discussed below-

➤ Ideal of motherhood:

Swami Vivekananda noticed that the Indian tradition personified women as divine mother. Swami Vivekananda was very happy about the ideal of motherhood expressed in Indian tradition and social system. He believed that one does not become mother by bearing a child. Motherhood is a behaviour. It is a constituent of qualities like empathy, selfless love, care which can be found in men and women both. He also considered Sarada Devi as his 'holy mother'. She was the wife of Sri Ramakrishna Paramhansa. She considered the world as one single home and she had ubiquitous maternal love beyond all the boundaries and barriers. Thus, Swami Vivekananda thought that one can become a mother through fostering the qualities of motherhood in her or his character. A mother should receive highest respect and everyone in the family inferior to her.

➤ Western ideal of womanhood:

Swamiji found many faults with the Western ideal of womanhood as there is an absence psychological and spiritual powers in them. They lacked inner solidarity between men and women in the west. The western families are oriented to wife but the Indian families are ruled by mothers.

➤ Emancipation of Women:

Freedom is the first and foremost requirement for inner and outer improvement of a society. Perfect freedom includes physical, mental as well as social privilege. It is one of the major concerns in contemporary society. Women should be able to stand on their own feet for the holistic development of a nation. He started a revolution to enhance the status of Indian women in different arena of national life. Freedom and liberty should enable women to gain confidence to do innovative activities for the development of self. To him, perfect freedom symbolizes perfect womanhood.

➤ **Education:**

We must keep a woman free from the oppression of men to help her grow. Swami Vivekananda thought that we can build self – confidence among the Indian women by illuminating her with right education. Education can enable the women to encounter challenges of their personal and social lives. Education of women was also not prohibited in Ancient India. They should be the master of their work and education should build leadership and qualities among them as well as strengthen their character. He felt the urgent need of a new system of education for women through which the qualities of self – sustenance, self – esteem, dedication, self – resistance could grow among them. Swamiji was also in favour of providing vocational training to the girl child along with spiritual education.

➤ **Gender Equality:**

Gender equality is the first condition for the development of a nation. Indian tradition treated women as *Shakti* – a source of infinite power and strength. There is no distinction between male and female in terms of soul and all are identical by birth. Since the nature of human soul is uniform, there should be no classification based on caste, creed, race etc.

➤ **Marriage:**

Swami Vivekananda believed that marriage makes a person to feel complete. People find their significant other through marriage. Swamiji thought that people should marry someone only once in their lifetime. One's divinity gets affected if one marries more than one time. As he supported monogamy for both men and women, he was against widow marriage as well. He criticized the tradition of child marriage.

➤ **Character building:**

Swami Vivekananda holds the view that Sita, Savitri and Damayanti should be the supreme paragon for character building of women. He was very optimistic about Indian concept of womanhood. A mother should be given highest admiration in a home. She is a guardian, solicitous, altruistic, selfless and compassionate. She is an object of veneration. A women should be jovial in her married life, otherwise she should opt for dissolution from her partner rather than being obligatory to stay together, Furthermore, he talked about Sanyasini who devote her life for the well – being of humanism. Swamiji thought it is the best gesture a person can display.

➤ **Social Services:**

Swami Vivekananda focused on developing greater attributes in women's character to enable her for social services. Firstly, she should be self – sacrificing. She must possess an inner urge to do philanthropic activities. To attain this goal, women should have an undying spirit, courage, passion and tolerance. In this way, they construct a better and progressive society. Swamiji also provide training facility for women to realize his vision. The trained women used to participate in educational and health camp, agriculture, livestock farming etc. Through various missions such as NRDP, RDP women were taught to raise their children in light of the teachings of Vedanta and Yoga.

Thus, Vivekananda, for the first time speak out about as a representative of the women members of Indian society. He focused on education as a means of physical and spiritual liberation of woman. He also focused on the application of Neo-Vedantic philosophy in his philosophy of feminism. For the spiritual realization of our nation, both men and women need education and freedom to remove the obstacles faced in day - to - day life. In 1916, he constructed Sarada Mandir for women.

Conclusion:

Swami Vivekananda's thoughts are still pertinent in the 21st century. His ideologies are still followed by many countries around the world. Swamiji believed, since the soul has no sex and caste, there should not be any prejudice on the basis of these. His point of view regarding child marriage was also very daring. Swamiji was against child marriage. One should attain physical and cognitive maturity to get married. At present, child marriage is banned in most of the nations.

Swamiji's concept of emancipation of women making progress in most of the countries. Women should be emancipated and personified as Brahman. In this day and age, each and every nation is focusing on deliverance of women for attaining perfect growth and enlargement of the society. According to Swamiji, the world is developing a bright outlook towards the philosophy of feminism. He stated that any society can obtain perfect ampleness by utilizing the capacities and potentialities of women (Vivekananda, 1957).

Swami Vivekananda also spoke out about education of girl child. He said, 'if you don't allow one to become a lion, he will become a fox. Women are a power, only now it is eviler because man oppresses women; she is the fox, but is no longer oppressed, she will be the lion' (Vivekananda, 1957). Education can make a women bold, self-dependent and self-confident. In present scenario as well, educating the girl child is a major concern of the society.

Furthermore, the ideal of eastern and western women depicts that women are treated as wife in the west. But, in the Eastern countries female are admired as mother. The Indian ideal of women focuses on inner upliftment and shows piousness more than the Western women.

Besides, Swamiji gave utmost importance on electrifying the character of Indian women. Sita should be the ideal of Indian women and each woman should abide by her footprints. Character is the most valuable property of a woman. In modern days also, Indian people worship Sita as an epitome of purity and grace.

Regarding marriage, Swamiji thought both husband and wife should be loyal and faithful to each other for a successful and happy marriage. Even in the present times, loyalty is highly required for a blissful and joyous married life.

The Indian women are highly gentle, calm and forgiving according to Swami Vivekananda. She is the expression of holiness. A man can attain spiritual bliss, which is the greatest virtue of life only with the help of a women. Thus, we can conclude that Vivekananda's philosophy of feminism was ahead of time and it is extremely relevant with reference to the present-day scenario.

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