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A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF AUROBINDO GHOSH AND SWAMI VIVEKANAND IN CONTEXT OF THEIR EDUCATIONAL PHILOSOPHY

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Abstract

The core of this study is the contribution that the educational philosophy of Swami Vivekananda and Sri Aurobindo can make in reforming the present Indian educational scenario. There are many similarities in the lives and worldview of these personalities who lived in the second half of the 18th century and the first half of the 19th century. Both of them believed that national education was a prerequisite for political freedom from foreign rule.

Keywords - Aurobindo Ghosh , Swami Vivekanand , Educational Philosophy and

Aurobindo Ghosh (1872-1950)

He was born in 1872 in Kolkata. He was sent to England to study there at the age of 6 where he grew up with the adherence of European culture. He mastered Greek and Latin language of study the works of ancient European philosophers, social engineers and poets. He also learnt French, German and Italian languages. He passed Indian civil service examination held in England in 1890 but could not appear in the horse riding test. As result, he was disqualified for the job and returned to India in 1893.

In India he studied Sanskrit language and literature and also served for 14 years in the state of Baroda.

He opened an ashram their which is known as Aurobindo ashram today. He spent the rest of his life in the ashram doing yoga, sadhna and meditation and for his spiritual advancement he kept least touch with this material world. He died in 1950 as a great saint.

The Prime Determinants of the Vision on Education of Sri Aurobindo

There are certain important beliefs which influence Sri Aurobindo's thoughts and vision.

1. India's struggle for freedom and its social context.
2. The belief that there would be a spiritual revolution.
3. The belief that this spiritual revolution would lead to the creation of a cultural society.
4. The firm patriotic belief that India has a great mission for the whole world.

Aurobindo's Educational Philosophy

Aurobindo's philosophy comes under the category of idealism. Like Vivekananda, Aurobindo believed that the innermost truth was the soul. Aurobindo too believed that the ultimate aim of education was the emancipation of the soul. But, the idea that 'humanity would evolve into an ideal society' was his unique contribution. His educational system was meant to create this ideal society. Aurobindo's philosophy is not based on the 'Kevala Advaita,' as Swami Vivekananda's philosophy is; Vivekananda's philosophy of Advaita has its source in Sri Sankara. Aurobindo's philosophy is not just a philosophy based on God and his manifestation; it is actually 'Poorna Advaita' (Integral Dualism). The philosophy that recognises, matter, soul, the 'Nirguna Bhrahman' and the 'Saguna Bhrahman' is

called Integral theory. Aurobindo's education policy is based on this integral philosophy.

The idea of the soul ascending and descending is unique to Aurobindo philosophy. The descend of the soul into the manifested material world and the reverse action i.e., the ascend of

the material manifestation into the realm of the soul is his own idea. The ascending action can occur only following the descending process. Therefore before 'evolution' there would be an 'involution'. This indicates that the process of creation includes the duality of evolution and involution. The core of Aurobindo's system of education is to evolve the human mind into the Supermind.

Aurobindo's ideas on knowledge and ignorance are not too far from Vivekananda's ideas. The absence of knowledge is perceived as ignorance. But, as per Aurobindo's view ignorance is not the absence of knowledge. For him, ignorance itself is a form of knowledge. That is an incomplete, partial knowledge. It is the comprehensive change that takes the human mind to its ultimate state i.e., to the Supermind. A person who has undergone this complete and comprehensive change and is illuminated by the light of pure knowledge is called 'Jnani', or man of knowledge or 'Gnostic being', as per Aurobindo.

Swami Vivekanand (1863-1902)

He was born in Kolkata. His real name was Narendra Nath Dutta. He inherited religious temperament and farsighted intelligence from his father. He was sent to school at five years of age. He studied history, literature and philosophy since very early age. Herbert Spencer and J.S. Mill were his favourite philosophers and Wordsworth was his favourite poet.

One day his headmaster Mr. Heasty introduced him to Shri Ram Krishna Paramhansa and Narendra Nath remained in his contact for about six years. Here he got initiated into the saintly order and was given the title of swami Vivekananda. When swami Vivekananda established Ram Krishna Paramhansa died in 1876, swami Vivekananda established Ram Krishna mission to proceed the unfinished religious assignments of his guru further. He spread the message of his guru that was actually the principle and practice of Vedanta in Asia, Europe and America.

The Prime Determinants of the Vision on Education of Swami Vivekananda

Vivekananda's educational ideas have been influenced by five major factors:

1. Intense devotion for his Master Sri Ramakrishna.
2. Knowledge of traditional educational system in India.

3. Love for the Nation.
4. Personal convictions.
5. The belief that a social revolution was possible through universal education.

Vivekananda's Educational Philosophy

Swami Vivekananda's philosophy is Sri Shankara's Advaita itself. The core belief of advaita is that the Jeevatma and Paramatma are one and the same. Vivekananda has made this advaita vision the fundamental tenet of his educational vision. It is when the Jeevatma joins with the paramatma that its limited knowledge becomes infinite. For this union, Swamiji suggests four paths – The Jnana Yoga, Bhakthi Yoga, Karma

Yoga and the Raja Yoga. According to him, man travels from a condition of lesser knowledge to a higher one and not from untruth to truth.

His other outlook is that no knowledge emanates from outside. Each soul is complete in itself and represents of the godly Self and by itself it hides the holistic knowledge within itself. The perfect Guru help the student to understand this hidden flame of knowledge.

Swamiji's another strong argument is that no one can teach anyone else anything new. His theory is that the Guru, who resides within the self starts to function with the help of the external Guru. Like all exponents of Vedanta, Swamiji believed that the soul by itself was pure and all-knowing. But, through wrong actions the soul loses its transparency and is covered by the darkness of ignorance. Through correct actions, the soul moves towards self-awareness (athma bodha) and acquires the ultimate knowledge (jnana sakshatkara).

Swamiji believed that education is not just the collection of information. The aim of education is to mould the life of a person, which should lead to man-making and also to consolidate of relevant facts. Vivekananda's philosophy of education is based on universal principles of morality and ethics of the value of education. Vivekananda says that without education no self-realisation is possible.

Vivekananda uses the term Brahman or Atma to mean Truth or Reality. Brahman is synonymous with God. To him, self-realisation is the ultimate aim of life and of education. To him, morality implies conscious, deliberate action for the good of humanity. His doctrine of 'karma' implies freedom of action. So his educational philosophy is a combination of knowledge and action. In Vivekananda's educational philosophy, the general and special aims of education have the single function of enriching the pupil's personality.

In answer to the present problems of India he pleads for the creation of a philosophy which gives equal importance to the claims of spirit and matter. To him, diversity is as real as unity. Matter is only 'veiled spirit'. Thus he creates a metaphysical synthesis reconciling the claims of spirit and matter and makes it one of the chief bases of his philosophy of education.

The Similarities in the Educational Philosophy of Sri Aurobindo and Swami Vivekananda

The similarities in the educational vision of Swami Vivekananda and Sri Aurobindo are as obtained.

- Both give much importance to spirituality in education.
- Swami Vivekananda and Sri Aurobindo use the term 'Brahman' or 'Atman' to mean Truth or reality.
- Self – realization is the ultimate aim of life and education.
- They believed that the contemporary educational system would cause much damage to the nation and a 'Bharateeya' system was essential.
- They believed that nobody could teach anybody else anything new and that through education one only realises what is within oneself.
- The belief that the teacher does not impart an external source of knowledge. Instead, he shows the student the path of acquiring knowledge.
- Both considered the 'emancipation' of soul as the ultimate aim of education.
- They believed that ignorance too was a form of knowledge ... a kind of partial knowledge.

The Differences in the Philosophy of Sri Aurobindo and Swami Vivekananda

- While Vivekananda's vision was based on the concept of Advaita, Aurobindo's thought was rooted in 'Poorna Advaita' (Integral Dualism)
- Aurobindo believed that before the ascending phase of the soul, it had descended. This is a core idea of his philosophy. However, Vivekananda has not made this a main theme of his philosophy.
- The idea of the evolution of human into a supramental being was solely the 'original and unique idea of Sri Aurobindo'.
- Aurobindo's vision predicted a process of involution before evolution.
- Swami Vivekananda and Sri Aurobindo had obviously differing views on the different levels of mental development. These are unique to Aurobindo's thought.

Conclusion

The influence of the thought of Swami Vivekananda and Sri Aurobindo in modern India is very significant. Vivekananda's words were an inspiration even to Mahatma Gandhi during the independence struggle. Swamiji was the source of inspiration to not only Mahatmaji, but to the other national heroes who took part in the national struggle for independence like Subhash Chandra Bose, Sister Nivedita and Subrahmanya Bharathi. It was Vivekananda's words that awakened a nation slumbering under a thousand year foreign rule. It was Aurobindo who motivated this nation into the realm of action. There are a lot of similarities in their lives and their mission in life. Both of them desired the nation's total independence.

Aurobindo believed that for the millions of people in the nation to be given an education, it was necessary to do so using their own methods and traditions. The education should be based on Bharateeya culture and tradition and the medium of education should be the Indian language. Aurobindo's ideas on 'National Education' tally with those of Swami Vivekananda on the same subject. Swami Vivekananda and Sri Aurobindo are the proponents of a vibrant nationalism. They believed that the vehicle of education should be used to impart nationalism to future generations. Swamiji considered education not only as the medium to impart nationalism, but also as the path to the liberation of the oppressed and working classes.

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