



**OUTLOOK OF SWAMI VIVEKANANDA ON WOMEN AND THEIR EDUCATION:  
AN ANALYTICAL STUDY**

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**ABSTRACT:** Swami Vivekananda was a great believer in education as an appliance for human betterment. His speeches, writings, and letters are full of reference to the degradation in which the masses had fallen because of the denial of literacy and education to them. He pleaded for the universalization of literacy development, and of mass education i.e. for all men and women. Calling himself a *Tyagi* monk in a letter written on October 27 1894, he decried the confining of religion to rituals, books, dogmas, and philosophy and declared “I do not believe in a God or religion which cannot wipe the widow’s tears or bring a piece of bread to the orphan’s mouth. He expressed his self-reliance that women will work out their own destinies once they get an education and it will not be for men to shape the destiny of women. In this paper, an attempt has been made to highlight the perceptions of Swami Vivekananda on women's empowerment with special reference to their education as expressed by Swami Vivekananda in his letters, writings, and speeches.

**Keywords:** Swami Vivekananda, Women Education, Women Empowerment

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**INTRODUCTION:** Vivekananda was a great believer in education as an appliance for human betterment. His speeches, writings, and letters are full of references to the degradation in which the masses had fallen because of the denial of literacy and education to them. He pleaded for the universalization of literacy development, and of mass education i.e. for all men and women. He asserted that “the chief cause of India’s ruin has been the monopolising of the whole education and intelligence of the land, by dint of pride and royal authority, among a handful of men.” All nations have attained greatness by paying proper respect to women. That country and that nation which do not respect women have never become great, nor will ever be in future. According to Swami Vivekananda, “Women have many and grave problems, but none that cannot be solved by that magic word: Education. If the women are raised, their children will by their noble actions elevate the name of the country; then will culture, knowledge, power and devotion awaken in the country.” Through incomparable



stories of our ancient Indian women, Swami Vivekananda places before the Indian consciousness a splendid illustration of the ideal woman. In his uniquely powerful and charismatic way, he held that shiny example for our women to follow. Swami Vivekananda spent his all too short life on this planet seeing missionaries who would fight as soldiers for the abolition of illiteracy, abolition of poverty, abolition of gender discrimination, and the service of the *dariddra-narayana* as their way of worship of God. In this paper, an attempt has been made to highlight the perceptions of Swami Vivekananda on women's empowerment with special reference to their education as expressed by Swami Vivekananda in his letters, writings, and speeches.

**OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:** This paper is an attempt to present, highlight and analyze based on the following objectives:

1. To highlight the perceptions of Swami Vivekananda on Women's empowerment.
2. To know and identify the thoughts expressed by Swami Vivekananda on Women's Education.

**METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY:** The information and data for this study have been collected from two sources i.e., Primary and Secondary. As a primary source of data thoughts and concepts given by Swami Vivekananda in his writings, speeches and letters on the said objectives have been analyzed qualitatively. Besides that, the secondary data have been collected from different books, journals, research articles, and websites. This study was delimited to only the perceptions of Swami Vivekananda on Women's empowerment and Women's education as expressed by Swami Vivekananda throughout his works, speeches, writings, letters etc.

**FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS:** Calling himself a *Tyagi* monk in a letter written on October 27 1894, he decried the confining of religion to rituals, books, dogmas, and philosophy and declared “I do not believe in a God or religion which cannot wipe the widow’s tears or bring a piece of bread to the orphan’s mouth. Where should you go to seek God – are not all the poor, the miserable, the weak, Gods? Why not worship them first? I believe in God and I believe in man. I believe in helping the miserable. I believe even in going to hell to save others.” In another letter, this time from Darjeeling on April 6, 1897, he



expressed his thoughts: “I heard to Japan that it was the belief of the girls of that country that their dolls would be animated if they were loved with all their heart. I too believe that India will awake again if anyone could love with all his heart the people of this country. Then only will India awake, when hundreds of large-hearted men and women, giving up all desires of enjoying the luxuries of life, will long and exert themselves to their utmost for the well-being of the millions of their countrymen who are gradually sinking lower and lower in the vortex of destruction and ignorance.”

Swami Vivekananda strongly advocated giving women their rightful place in society by removing their backwardness through education and training. He expressed his confidence that women will work out their own destinies once they get an education and it will not be for men to shape the destiny of women. Replying to a disciple who cast doubts on his plan to start a math for women disciples, Vivekananda asked him to indicate the scriptures that stated that women were not competent for knowledge and devotion. On the contrary, during the *Vedic* or *Upanishadic* times, women like *Maitreyi*, *Gargi*, and others had taken the place of *Rishis* through their skill in discussing about the Brahman. It was the priests who, during the period of degradation, when they made castes other than the *Brahman* incompetent for the study of *Vedas*, deprived the women also of all their rights. He told the disciple “If you do not raise the women who are the living embodiment of the Divine Mother, do not think that you have any other way to rise.” In a letter written to a Bengali disciple on December 28 1893, he reverted to the subject, quoting Manu, “Daughter should be supported and educated with as much care as the sons” and asserted that unless the conditions of women are bettered in India, the country will continue to remain as backward as it was at the moment. Swami Vivekananda declared himself in favour of rising the age of marriage but added that it should be accompanied by education of the right type which led to character formation, strengthening of the mind, development of the intellect, and self-reliance. In fact, he wanted education to be made available for women as much as for men. But once they are educated, it should be for them to choose their role in life and not for men to tell them what they should do. “Educate your women first”, he said in a lecture, “and leave them to themselves; then they will tell you what reforms are necessary for them.” Speaking on his life and mission to a select audience in California on January 27 1900, he told the audience that the work he wanted to do for men was also wanted on parallel lines for women. “No man shall dictate to a woman”, he said, “nor a woman to a man. Each one is independent. Women will work out



their own destinies – much better too than men can ever do for them. All the mischief to women has come because men undertook to shape the destiny of women.” Swami Vivekananda's views on education were very progressive. He praised the educated women of the west and compared them to the Indian women of those days. Swami Vivekananda argued that our women needed the kind of education by which character is formed, the strength of mind is increased, the intellect is expanded, and by which one can stand on one's own feet. When such education is extended to our women, women will solve their own problems. He did not doubt the ability of the Indian woman to handle any situation that life threw at her.

At the level of the Self, there is no difference between men and women. One can see how the entire thinking of Swami Vivekananda in terms of equality of gender, their ability to study, and take part in the affairs of the society is based on this conviction of his: “It is very difficult to understand why in this country so much difference is made between men and women, whereas the Vedanta declares that the same conscious Self is present in all beings. If you do not raise the women who are the living embodiments of the Divine Mother, don't think that you have any other way to rise.”(Complete Works, 6th Ed., Vol. 7, p 214) Swami Vivekananda firmly believed that “Liberty is the only condition of growth.”(Complete Works, 9th Ed., Vol. 4, p 346) He said that “The idea of perfect womanhood is perfect independence.”(Burke, M.L., 1983, p 98)

**CONCLUSION:** Thus Swami Vivekananda used his *Vedantic* philosophy to drive home his promotion of equality and independence for women, educating them, removing their backwardness, and allowing them to play their rightful role in society. Undoubtedly his practical *Vedanta* went even farther than socialism in the place it gave to women in society. Today, of course, everyone is for women's education and giving them their rightful place; but in actual fact, women's education in rural India is still at a low level, while as regards the inclusion of spirituality in their education, it is still to be accomplished. So here again, while Swami Vivekananda has influenced the making of modern India, what has been achieved is still far below what he preached. There is a great need today to reemphasize the outlook made by Swami Vivekananda on Indian women's empowerment and women's education for the encroachment of the country.



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