



**ORIGINAL RESEARCH PAPER**

**Political Science**

**VIVEKANANDA AND WOMEN EMPOWERMENT: RETROSPECT AND PROSPECT**

**KEY WORDS:** Women's Rights, Self-Defense, Women's Development

**Dr. Swagata Bhattacharjee**

Assistant Professor, Dept. of Political Science, Vivekananda Mission Mahavidyalaya, Chaitanyapur, Purba Medinipur

As the observance of the 75th anniversary of India's Independence comes to a close a stock taking is in order with reference to the dreams cherished by those who first kindled the fire of national awakening like Swami Vivekananda. While drawing the balance sheet between what we achieved and where we lagged, we find that there is a huge deficit in the sphere of emancipation and empowerment of our women constituting almost half of the population. The deficit is manifest in matters of education, health care employment and personal and social security in an ambience of patriarchy. The present paper looks back into the history of early national awakening during late 19th century shaped so majestically by Swamiji through his life and works. A spiritualist social reformer, and the philosopher saint, he raised the issue of women's freedom from socio cultural bondages, and self-dependence gained through education and outdoor activities. He raised his crusading voice against dowry, child marriage, polygamy and bride burning that was rampant during his time. He considered women as the equal of men in all respects and focused on flowering of their personhood. Women to him had their self-identity and autonomy to pursue the careers of their choice. They were not to be treated merely as wife, mother, daughter or sister but as persons playing an autonomous and active agency role in society. He had before him the examples of his mother Bhubaneswari, Rani Rasmoni, Sarodamoni and above all Nivedita all of whom excelled in their personhood and showed the way to true empowerment of women. This message of Swamiji is no less relevant now than before and has to be decoded to be properly understood by the present generation of women in India.)

In this year, we are celebrating the closing ceremony of 75yrs of our Independence. A longtime goes on with some happy and unhappy expectations. Contribution of women in the field of socio, economic and political, cultural areas are neglected, most of cases we are less bothered to discuss about these, but in time of academic discussion women and children both are very purple topic for social science research.

In our practical life we very tactfully or intentionally try to avoid the real problems, which women are facing in their daily life. Only says this is very negligible issue .still today this orthodox practice is continuing in our society. India is the biggest country according to population. In India , we saw different culture, communities, languages and food habits of people. But it's very surprising that differentiation on the basis of gender is mostly common among all of them. Women can't easily access the public domain like socio, economic, cultural or political field.

The main object of this paper is to find out the relevance of Swami Vivekananda's views on women today and to point out the major view, which helps empowerment of women. We select Swami Vivekananda's view on women as because as a saint he wanted his country's development from the core of his heart and fought for women's empowerment during the nineteenth century, which was treated as a turning point in women's development in India. As a sincere reader and analyst of social science Swami Vivekananda told women should play vital role for nation building and also help societal development. If they could access the facilities they also took the responsibility with male counterparts.

As women are facing so many challenges in their daily life, because society is always trying to impose some invaluable rules and practices on what they do and do not .This paper will try to recover these dark areas which are the main constraints for women empowerment.

Why discussion of women issues are important for social science research. Today we like to live with nuclear family structure, our expectation is also changing in our today's life , as a result we all are facing some challenges in our new family structure . In this situation particularly women are also facing plenty of problems as in India women are treated as heart of every family. Social reformers, researchers, analysts, academicians observed that the status of women are directly related with societal development. They also pointed out, that in India women are facing particularly two types of challenges one is they don't get proper social status and are secondary in society even in families regularly they are living with so many difficulties, actually they are suffering with their own agony.

(2)

'নারী সুলভ' or 'মেয়েলি' or 'মেয়ে মানুষ' these terms are frequently used by common people here . May be by these words our gender biased society again wants to highlight the social status of women as inferior to men because our society is patriarchal. When social science researchers are plugged to find out the answer how women could overcome their problems in their daily life....we can again quote from Swami Vivekananda's " এদের শিক্ষা দিয়ে ছেড়ে দাও, তারপর নিজেরাই নিজেদের ভাগ্য নির্ধারণ করবে ", he also introduced the worship of mother power by which women get her social dignity. For the betterment of society, empowerment of women is most important issue. According to Swamiji two essential criteria are needed for women empowerment one is self- confidence and another one is full assurance.

Time is flowing with it's own rhythm accordingly, society is also reformed from time to times. If we flash back our past like in the period of ancient or Vedic culture, we notice a good bonding was there within either sex ,no bother if he is Male or she is female, both enjoyed the social facilities and cultural numbs. It was one of the most remarkable things of that time that women got the opportunity for education at the house of a preceptor or even they got the chance of Upanayana programme like Male. Manu- Smriti and Puranas also give the priority to women, according to both they enjoyed the high social status like Male. From various verses we came to know respect of women also would be treated as worship of God. But situations deteriorated in the period of medieval times particularly from the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries onwards the social status of women became more vulnerable. Whereas we get a glorifying image of women in Vedas, Puranas and Upanishad.

In the nineteenth century as social analyst, philosopher and saint Swami Vivekananda strongly fought for the helpless women who were suffering the agony in their daily life, Swamiji wants social reformation by women's awakening, liberation and freedom, He described national development as closely related with women development, the status of women is lower than male because deprivation of women rights are the main constants for our country, In our country they are treated as neglected only because of this reason our

nation can't reach highest position .As saint Swamiji came forward to protest against the violations of the rights of women. That time Swamiji fought against polygamy, child marriage, bride burning, dowry etc.

He compared our society with a birds, every bird has two wings, which help them fly in open sky. According to Swamiji two wings are Male and female respectively. If any one can't work properly then birds could not fly. So for the sake of national development women's empowerment is essential. He also described women as world mother. we should give the maximum opportunities and care for them Social status of women is very much related with national development. According to Swamiji " uplift of the women, the awakening of the masses must come first, and then only can any real good come about for the country for India ".<sup>2</sup> He also focuses that for over all development of women freedom is essential, he told "Liberty is the first condition of growth".<sup>3</sup>

(3)

Self -confidence is needed for upbringing women development in India, women are facing plenty of hazards in their daily life because most of the time they usually live as dependent, they are unable to take decisions because they are treated as inferior. Swamiji was against these orthodox concepts. He always stood for self- development. Self -confidence leads to self -defense, if they are used to this thinking process, naturally their self- development will come about automatically and they will also experience their choices.

Swamiji always believed that education is only the important pillar for development, education means not it's like formal education which are not just to learn few black and white words, education should help to create character building, make healthy mental set up and lastly also help to make them stand on their own. According to him education should enlighten their over all development actual vocational education is mostly essential for women empowerment. These guidelines by Swamiji are relevant as in that time as they are also important for today.

If we look back our historical background we found particularly in the time of nationalist movement the importance of women issue got more priority.

In the nineteenth century Indian educator and social reformer like Raja Rammahan Roy, Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar, Swami Vivekananda were actively involved in the struggles for women empowerment, they also pointed out that women are treated as inferior because of their illiteracy, negligence, unconsciousness. Swamiji said that for social progress and restructuring gender disparities inequality should be prohibited and we should be open minded for the uplift of women's dignity as they could be treated as human beings. "or by the mercy of some great perfected soul, we reach the heights"<sup>4</sup> this is the message of Swami Vivekananda.

Swamiji wanted to highlight that women have womanhood, motherhood and personhood. The status of women is not a negligible issue, because it helps nation building. Male and female both have separate identities, they both should have free access to knowledge and individual thinking capabilities. It is important to mention here self- controlling power and self -development are both mostly hampered amongst women because of child marriage, it also makes the constraints for nation building.

According to Swamiji in our society women have many images sometimes they are treated as Wife or daughter or mother. Among them in our society the mother image is most respectful .Mother image is also superior to Wife image. The motherly love never fails. Children affection is the first priority after that they will think for themselves. in bengali the

word 'Maa' is most powerful. No doubt in India the worship of Goddess Kali also symbolized the women power. " Ma...Ma Kali ,you came for me! You appeared before me you came to give Darshan to your poor,humble.child....."<sup>5</sup> prayers done by Ranirasmani .

.Swamiji was influenced by three reformed women in his life one was obviously his mother named Bhubaneswari Devi others were SaradaDevi and Rani Rasmani, but it's also important to mention here the name of Sister Nivedita who was also one of the most valuable personalities in his life.

In the nineteenth century there were a few social movements but Ramkrishna- Vivekananda movement was exceptional. The main reason behind it was Swamiji's constructive approach and well planned functions in different spheres of social reforms and cultural regeneration.

Swamiji repeatedly told that the social status of people as well as the status of women must be needed for the resurrection of India. Actual social uplift of men and women both are essential in out which social development is totally impossible. He also opposed gender in equality in society. He also guided us how we could overcome the problems.

Spirituality is the one way by which we can solved the problem. He highlighted that there was no differentiation between men and women in the world of the spiritual. Swamiji himself was attracted by a line of Upanishad that was " স্বং স্ত্রী স্বং পুমানসি স্বং কুমার উত বা কুমারী।"<sup>6</sup> it's means you are women, you are also Male.

Swamiji also pointed out that the main reason for our suffering is inequality, illiteracy, and unlimited expectations. These three are co-related with each other. According to him for creating a better society we should live in a spirit of unity and togetherness and leave our ego and proudly attitude, in 1894 and 1900 respectively Swamiji delivered two important lectures at Combridge and California where he compared Indian women with their western counterparts.<sup>7</sup> He saw that in western countries women are more powerful than Indian women. India's women had tampering attitude which was not so good for character building.

(4)

For the societal progress even in today's life Swami Vivekananda's speech and Messages are still relevant .our social life now flows with a false consciousness. We the people here are very much suffering from loneliness, mental illness, egocentric attitude. We are only busy with the conflict of self-interests. But if want to live with fresh mind set and comfort we should have to observe Swamiji's message. We can say for better tomorrow we have to read more of Swamiji's writings and speeches, need more and more research on his works and more academic discussion on Swamiji, through this process we would learn his messages for the sake of women, and the progress of social life. We should keep in mind the speech of Swamiji, which was like " ব্রহ্ম হতে কীট পরমাণু, সর্বভূতে সেই প্রেমময়, মন প্রাণ শরীর অর্পণ কর সাথে, এ সবার পায়, বহুরূপে সম্মুখে

তোমার, ছাড়ি কোথা খুঁজিছ ঈশ্বর? জীবের প্রেম করে যেই জন, সেইজন সেবিছে ঈশ্বর।"<sup>8</sup>

#### REFERENCES:

1. Udbodhan, 12th Sankha, December 2012, p-1053 (in Bengali)
2. Majumdar, R. C, Swami Vivekananda :A Historical Review, Advaita Ashrama, Calcutta, 7000014, pp-114-15
3. ibid, p-115
4. Nivedita Sister, The Master As I Saw Him, Sanagec Publishing, House LLP, India, 2020, p-216
5. Patharkar Shubhangi, translation by Patharkar, V.M, Rani Rashmoni: The spirit of Rennaissance, Litreasure Publishers, Puna, 411008, 2019, p-278.
6. Udbodhan, pratham Sankha, January 2021, p-31 (in Bengali)
7. Mukhopadhyay Apurba, Essays On Post-Colonial Democracy in India, Avenel Press, Kolkata, p-219.
8. Swami Vivekananda Bani o Rachhana, (VOL-6), Udbodhan Karjalaya, Kolkata 700003, 1973, p-269. (in Bengali)