



Vivekananda's view on Women Education

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Introduction

The position and status of women has been changing 'from age to age'. Sometimes, even within the same century, diametrically opposite views about the worth and importance of women have prevailed. While one school calls women 'the highest gift of God to man', and other asserts that 'the best way to reach God is to avoid women'.¹ Much of modern Indian literature continues to portrait women as if they were unfeeling beings Created just for man's lust and service. In the 1st half of 18th century Indian's social reform movement began with the first modern man Ram Mohan Roy and was dominated besides him, by Ramkrishna, Vivekananda and host of societies and institutions which were founded by them for socio-religious reforms. The cause of women was significant ingredient of their multi-faceted social reform movements. There appears to be a near identity in their perception of the condition of women from which they were convinced they had to be rescued. Ramkrishna specifically wanted to save woman from her depiction as kamini – a symbol of sex ² only, so that he worshiped his wife Sarada as a God (mother) to break the myth that women were the door step of hell. He was wanted to high the status of women and society should be respectful to the woman as a human being.

Indian society in the 19th century had fallen into a stage of degeneration after centuries of Afghan and Mughal, and then British rule. The British rule, specially, had created widespread poverty and hunger, and the propaganda of their missionaries had created a sense of insecurity among the people about their traditional customs and beliefs. Faced with this threat, the caste-ridden society had retreated into a shell, and in order to protect themselves from this attack became more orthodox and repressive. At this crucial period rose a number of important reformers like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Vidyasagar, Swami Dayanand and Swami Vivekananda. They strived ceaselessly to reform the Indian society, and in doing so, raised a new voice of pan- Indian nationalism. They were thus the vanguards of the Freedom Movement. Vivekananda constantly inspired the young girls by citing the example of Sita, Damayanti, Khana, and Mira.³ He asserted that God blesses only those families which treat their womenfolk well and not the ones which hold them in dishonor. Whereas Ramkrishna sought to liberate women by comprehending the traditionally distinct image of men-women relationship. This first voice of protest was not so much against the political exploitation by the British but against their moral exploitation of the Indian society, and this was to guide and provide the unique feature of the Indian Freedom struggle.

All of them were eager to liberate women from the evils of child- marriage, child widowhood, Sati, polygamy, eradication of prostitutions, superstitions, adultery, purdah and more over illiteracy among the women who were living in the darkest life like an animal life. All of them were eager to restore women their lost identity

and their position of absolute equality with men in all walks of life. They were keen to provide her with equality of opportunity, especially in the area of education. Vivekananda, however thought that this may just not be enough. He underlined the need of restoring their property right and lost identity and status. The ‘woman question’ formed an integral part of Hindu reformism in 19th century India and this was a question on which Swami Vivekananda, not unlike his forebears, wrote copiously and conservatively. This ‘question’ did not adopt an argumentative framework that was meant to empower women – at least not in the foreseeable future. Rather, it was an attempt to suitably come to grips with and circumvent emerging modernist critiques that bemoaned the despicable status of the Indian woman and the burden of various social and cultural obligations that society placed on her.

My sole aim in this piece is to shed light on the views of Swami Vivekananda on women empowerment and education that are worth discussing and cherishing, so far as all reformers contribute positively to our argument for a need for emphasis on certain Indic values and conceptions of femininity. Among these leaders, Vivekananda position was unique in that he was in close touch with both the core of Hindu religious thought and with the Western philosophy. He was thus able to take up the best features of both in his work and attempt to fuse them in his dream of the future. The message he preached in India was not the one of renunciation and mysticism that he was used to hearing. Instead he cried for work – work for the downtrodden and poor of the country, work to revitalize the society as a whole. Strength was his message to Indians– physical strength, moral strength, strength to work for others. He railed against the weakness that had crept into the society, and preached self-control for the young. And it was a message powered by his own example and his tireless work throughout the country.

His mother’s warm presence made Naren (Swamiji’s name) realize the essentiality of Shakti early on. In his eyes, he could see his mother as a carrier of ethical and cultural tropes of the Indic civilization. Motherhood then, and womanhood in general, turned out for him to be the repository of Indic culture and traditions. Very often you may have to suffer injustice or unpleasant consequences for holding to the truth; but you must not, under any circumstances, abandon it.’ Many years later Narendranath proudly said to an audience, ‘I am indebted to my mother for whatever knowledge I have acquired.’⁴ It should not come as a surprise then, that it was Sister Nivedita who eventually became Vivekananda’s spiritual heir, and who may be regarded in a sense as his ‘spiritual daughter’.⁵ In a letter dated July 29, 1897, the Swami wrote to her: *“Let me tell you frankly that I am now convinced that you have a great future in the work for India. What was wanted was not a man but a woman, a real lioness, to work for the Indians – women especially. India cannot yet produce great women, she must borrow them from other nations. Your education, sincerity, purity, immense love, determination, and above all, your Celtic blood, makes you just the woman wanted.”*⁶

Swami Vivekananda once rightly questioned “In what scriptures do you find statements that women are not competent for knowledge and devotion? In the period of degeneration, when the priests made the other castes incompetent for the study of the Vedas, they deprived the women also of all their rights. Otherwise you will find that in the Vedic or Upanishadic age Maitreyi, Gargi, and other ladies of revered memory have taken places of Rishis through their skill in discussing about Brahma. In an assembly of a thousand Brahmans who were all erudite in the Vedas, Gargi boldly challenged Yagnavalkya in a discussion about Brahma. Since such ideal women were entitled to spiritual knowledge, why shall not the women have same privilege now? What has happened once can certainly happen again. History repeats itself. 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. The writings and ideas of anyone should be seen and analyzed in the context of one’s time. For all the claims of Swami Vivekananda’s gender bias, we must acknowledge the fact that he, along with Sister Nivedita and others, did contribute immensely to the upliftment of poor Indian women.

In his view, not only did the Vedic literature itself establish women occupying the most exalted place in the society but also the ancient lore attested to a robust intellectual tradition amongst both women and men. A society that regarded Devi or Shakti as the soul-force of the universe surely had to place women on an equal pedestal with men, if not superior. This is also the reason why Vivekananda believed that a society’s progress, well-being, and salvation lay with its women.⁷ In line with the tradition of ancient Indic scholars, he viewed the relationship

between men and women as being one of perfect equality. The ideal of womanhood centers in the Aryan race of India, the most ancient in the world's history. In that race, men and women were priests, saha-dharmini', or co-religionists, as the Vedas call them. There every family had its hearth or altar, on which, at the time of the wedding, the marriage fire was kindled, which was kept alive, until either spouse died, when the funeral pile was lighted from its spark. Their man and wife together offered their sacrifices, and this idea was carried so far that a man could not even pray alone, because it was held that he was only half a being, for that reason no unmarried man could become a priest.⁸ *"You often note, when people are discussing as to what man and woman can do, always the same mistake is made. They think them showman at his best because he can fight, for instance, and undergo tremendous physical exertion; and this is pitted against the physical weakness and the non-combating quality of woman. This is unjust. A woman is as courageous as a man. Each is equally good in his or her way. What man can bring up a child with such patience, endurance, and love as the woman can? The one has developed the power of doing; the other, the power of suffering. If the woman cannot act, neither can man suffer. The whole universe is one of perfect balance."*⁹ Vivekananda repeatedly told that India's downfall was largely due to her negligence of women. The great images of Brahmavidinis like Maitreyi and Gargi of the Upanishad age, and women missionaries like Sanghamitra carrying Buddha's message to Sri Lanka, all were laying buried deep due to millennium of foreign domination. There is no chance of the welfare of the world unless the condition of women is improved.

Vivekananda was not oblivious to the numerous examples scattered throughout the nation's history of women who challenged all kinds of stereotypes from time to time. He was well aware of the presence of great souls like Rani Lakshmi Bai even around his own time. He did not have to turn to the Vedic period every time to justify or show evidence for his positions.¹⁰ *"We come to another class of women. This mild Hindu race produces fighting women from time to time. You may have heard of the woman [Lakshmi Bai, Queen of Jhansi] who, during the Mutiny of 1857, fought against the English soldiers and held her own ground for two years – leading modern armies, managing batteries and always charging at the head of her army. This queen was a Brahmin girl. When he talks of this woman his voice becomes animated. He used to say that she was a goddess – she was not a human being. This old veteran thinks he never saw better generalship."*¹¹

Women Education and its Present Relevance

In the area of women welfare, Vivekananda campaigned the cause of female education. He relied on Manu who had enjoyed that *"Daughters should be supported and educated with as much care and attention as the sons."*¹² He thought that it was the only true means for achieving their upliftment. Education would solve the problems of Indian women by rescuing them from their state of utter helplessness and dependence. Educated wives would moreover inspire their husbands with noble ideas and make their sons heroic. He would like the girls to learn in common with the boys, grammar, theology, medicine, arithmetic and art including Vedas. They would be also imparted special education, in keeping with their role in household and that would include cooking hygienic food, making dresses, and ornaments, keeping family accounts and above all securing happiness in the family. He argued that if women were not educated, how could they become teachers in girl's schools? Believing that the salvation of India "depends upon in women", he would ask women to have faith in themselves and be "strong, hopeful and unashamed".¹³

Swami Vivekananda warned it is completely unfair to discriminate between sexes, as there is no any sex distinction in "Atman (soul); the soul has neither sex, nor caste nor imperfection. He suggested not thinking that there are men and women, but only that there are human beings. To make a beginning of women education his argument cantered on chastity because it is the heritage of Hindu women. When we look back into the past we found the glory of women v.i.z- Ghosha, Apala, Maitrayee, Gargi are known to us as a nature of purity and chastity. In the Vedic age we found women belonged to an uplifted social status. But the beginning of the medieval age to colonial era we found women are degraded dominated and exploited by the society. Before Swamiji , Raja Ram Mohan, Vidyasagar were also engaged to reformed the society for the service of women. They eradicated the burning of a chaste wife on the funeral pile of her husband, child marriage and polygamy and so on. But Swamiji was the man of different pole .The main objectives of his scheme of women education was to make them strong,

fearless and conscious of their charity and dignity. Women must be put in a position, so that they could solve their problems in their own way. Swami Vivekananda defended the marginalization of women. He visited England in 1895 and met Margaret Elizabeth Noble an Irish lady who was in the midst of learning about the Buddha. Influenced by swami Vivekananda's teaching she became the first Western women to be a Sanyasini named Bhagini Nivedita. Nivedita played a major role in promoting the rights of women in rural India, according to Swamiji's instructions she started a school for girls for the basic education. The school is today known as "Ramakrishna Sarada Mission Sister Nivedita Girl's school", situated in Bagbazar in North Kolkata."

Swamiji says mother tongue is the best medium of social and mass education. Thinking the different social status and works of women he arranged a different curriculum which includes -1) moral value 2) literature and Sanskrit 3) Grammar 4) Craft and cooking 5) Home science along with Yoga, Worship, and Meditation. The main objectives of education are man making and character building. There is no different in case of women education. Swamiji instructed to build schools in rural areas. He formed devoted nuns who were engaged to teach them. Swamiji instructed that, being educated women should not imitate man. Instead of that through this education they would be modern Sita, Maitrayee, Gargi. In this purpose Swamiji established "Sarada Math". Ma Sarada says—example is more important than advice—which she showed throughout her life. There is no chance for the welfare of the world unless the condition of woman is improved. It is not possible for a bird to fly on only one wing. He thought that "Educate your women first and leave them to themselves; then they will tell you what reforms are necessary for them". Our right of interference is limited entirely to giving education. Women must be put in a position to solve their own problems in their own way. No one can or ought to do this for them. And our Indian women are capable of doing it as any in the world, he always wanted to proof that thinking. These thoughts of Swami Vivekananda, explain how significant female literacy is. Unless the gap between males and females literacy is abridged, it is very difficult to steer and propel national development.

Vivekananda proposed education as the prime remedy to the social malaise faced by women ¹⁴ since it was mainly the field of education that had shut its door to women and hampered their overall growth, opening up its doors would surely help women in recovering their freedom and development. In India the Education system has expanded rapidly. But still a large number of women are in dark and the gender gap in literacy rate remains starting by its presence. The following facts and figures throw light on the criticality of the problem which is a harsh reality and demonstrate that we have a herculean task ahead. ¹⁵

Literacy rates in India (1951-2011)

Year	Persons	Males	Females	Gender Gap in Literacy rate
1951	18.33	27.16	8.86	18.30
1961	28.30	40.46	15.35	25.05
1971	34.45	45.96	21.97	23.98
1981	43.57	56.38	29.76	26.62
1991	52.21	64.13	39.29	24.84
2001	64.84	75.26	53.67	21.59
2011	74.04	82.14	65.46	16.68

The Report of the Committee on Value Based Education of 1999, highlighted the need to inculcate the principles of truth, righteous conduct, peace, love and nonviolence, which are the religious values propagated by Swamiji. The development agenda of the 21 century also acknowledged education as the key to women's empowerment for the same reasons as Swamiji foresaw in the 19th century. The millennium development goals envisage that education of

women increases their productivity, raising output and reducing poverty. It promotes gender equality within households and removes constraints on women's decision making which parallel quoted by the Swami Vivekananda in the 19th century itself. He is one of the most enduring icons of the rise of Indian nationalism in modern India. We know him today as being one among the first generation of leaders who raised the voice of Indian nationality. Equally important is that he was an intensely religious man who lived a life immersed in spirituality. His position was unique in that along with a modern education which gave him a critical attitude, and his account of his experience and the importance of this in his life is as important as his work in nation building. "In spite of her innumerable linguistic, ethnic, historical and regional diversities, India has had from time immemorial a strong sense of cultural unity. It was, however, Swami Vivekananda who revealed the true foundations of this culture and thus clearly defined and strengthened the sense of unity as a nation. Similarly Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose wrote: "Swami Vivekananda harmonized the East and the West, religion and science, past and present. And that is why he is great. Our countrymen have gained unprecedented self-respect, self-reliance and self-assertion from his teachings." ¹⁶

He was emphatic that women must be educated, for he believed that it is the women who mold the next generation, and hence, the destiny of the country? In his educational scheme for India, the uplift of women and the masses received the highest priority. The idea of perfect womanhood is perfect independence. Women have many and grave problems, but none that cannot be solved by that magic word: Education. 'Daughters should be supported and educated with as much care and attention as the sons.' As sons should be married after observing Brahmacharya up to the thirtieth year, so daughters also should observe Brahmacharya and be educated by their parents. Vivekananda was against the early marriage. Early marriage was the very reason for the existence of so many widows, so many women dying early and the birth of emaciated children who would only increase the number of beggars in the country. According to him, the Indian society had not yet lost the plot. He was hopeful of women being capable of equipping themselves with the required resources to be able to actively contribute to the development of society. About his contemporary times, he stated that: "Women in statesmanship, managing territories, governing countries, even making war, have proved themselves equal to men – if not superior. In India, I have no doubt of that. Whenever they have had the opportunity, they have proved that they have as much ability as men, with this advantage – that they seldom degenerate.

The Indic civilization has, for most of its history, had a well-entrenched education system reaching out to the masses at large, available in equal proportion to both men and women. This was the case at least until the advent of the medieval period or the dark ages for our civilization. The village education system was in a good shape until the eighteenth century with both boys and girls participating in it, as is very well documented by Dharampal.¹⁷ We must see to their growing up as ideal matrons of home in time. The children of such mothers will make further progress in the virtues that distinguish the mothers. It is only in the homes of educated and pious mothers that great men are born. And you have reduced your women to something like manufacturing machines; alas, for heaven's sake, is this the outcome of your education? The 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. ¹⁸

In this backdrop, Vivekananda's proposal for the upliftment of Indian women by educating them seemed fit in the state of things. For him, education in itself was societal purifier and a driver towards its betterment. He stated that: How can there be any progress of the country without the spread of education, the dawning of knowledge? Even no real effort or exertion in the cause is visible among the few in your country who are the promise of the future, you who have received the blessings of education. But he know for certain that absolutely nothing can be done to improve the state of things unless there is a spread of education first among the women and the masses. And so I have it in my mind to train up some Brahmachârinis and Brahmachârinis, the former of whom will eventually take the vow of Sannyâsa and try to carry the light of education among the masses, from village to village, throughout the country, while the latter will do same among women. But the whole work must be done in the style of our own country. Just as centers have to be started for men, so also centers have to be started for teaching women. Brahmacharinis of education and character should take up the task of teaching at these different

centers. History and the Purânas, housekeeping, and the arts, the duties of home-life, and principles that make for the development of an ideal character have to be taught with the help of modern science, and the women students must be trained up in ethical and spiritual life.

The necessity of having educated women, and educated mothers, was in order to secure the future of the civilization, in so far as it was the mother who played the most crucial part in molding the character of the child. However, this should in no way be perceived as restricting the role of women to the domestic sphere. The Swami strongly argued for the education of women so that they could decide their own future. All that society and reformers were required to do was to make education accessible to women. That was the limit of their 'right of interference'.¹⁹

After that, once they were in a position where they would be capable of handling their problems on their own, they should be left on their own to chalk their way in life. For the Swami then, 'true education' was the solution to all the problems faced by women, as it would truly empower them. He defined 'true education' as such, "*It may be described as a development of faculty, not an accumulation of words, or as a training of individuals to will rightly and efficiently. So shall we bring to the need of India great fearless women – women worthy to continue the traditions of Sanghamitrâ, Lilâ, Ahalyâ Bâi, and Mirâ Bâi – women fit to be mothers of heroes because they are pure and selfless, strong with the strength that comes of touching the feet of God.*"²⁰ Swami Vivekananda, while contemplating on the emphasis on European education in the modern era, remarked that it was strange that in spite of the high status in which people in India held foreign education, foreign universities such as Oxford and Cambridge were themselves shut for women while Calcutta University was producing women with an excellent education.²¹ He held foreign rule to be the main roadblock to the dissemination of proper education in Indian society.

Yet, he always had hope that India had the 'power of spirituality' within it, with which it would conquer foreign domination, and once again this land of great women would illuminate the western world with its treasure of spiritual knowledge.²² Swami Vivekananda, as a futurist, viewed women as the harbingers of our civilization and as the shapers of our nation's future. He had immense faith in Hinduism and our women and believed that we would be able to bounce back to our worthy position as the spiritual and ethical leaders of the world. His views on women need to be revisited most importantly because they highlight the ethics and values that we once again need to inculcate as a society. The feminine has been perceived as a symbol of duty, patience, self-restraint, and suffering in our culture. It is only these values that can help us tackle the menace of unbridled greed, indulgence, and debased morals brought about with the hegemony of capitalism and modernity. Mahatma Gandhi also emphasized the same values throughout his life and considered women to be the way to our salvation. We, as a society, need to meditate on the sayings of these leaders as they have shown us the path to survive and flourish as a civilization. Once when asked what the Swami would advise to the women of India, he responded, "*Why, to the women of this country. I would say exactly what I say to the men. Believe in India and in our Indian faith. Be strong and hopeful and unashamed, and remember that with something to take, Hindus have immeasurably more to give than any other people in the world.*"²³

Swamiji rightly pointed out that unless Indian women secure a respectable place in this country, nation can never march forward. Swami said, the progress of a nation depends on its treatment of women. And it is impossible to get back India's lost pride and honor unless they try to better the condition of women. So, according to him, there is no chance for welfare of the world unless the condition of women is improved. It is one of the foremost concerns of the Government of India as well as of the society at large. It is Due to the fact that at the present time, the educated women play a very significant role in overall development and progress of the country. India is now optimistic in the field of women education. After Independence, Women education acquired special significance and has been supported by the government from time to time through its policies and programs. Planners and policy makers have recognized that education can bring a reduction in inequalities and functions as a mean of improving their status within the family, society and nation. In spite of various committees created and plans & programs executed by the government to promote women education, still a gender gap in literacy rate is existent. No doubt, this gender gap is

gradually getting reduced but still, female illiteracy rate is 35%, as per the data given by census of India 2011. Keeping this in view the plan and programs of action has to be formulated and implemented in the future to reach the target of maximum women literacy rate and propel the progress of nation. Swami Vivekananda's vision on *women education and Today's mission of eradicating gender gap in literacy rate both indicate one goal....progress...progress of women and thereby the progress of entire nation. Many paths, one goal.* "Arise, Awake & Stop not still the goal is reached."²⁴

Conclusion

The social and religious reformers of 19th century devoted a lot of their time and put in a lot of effort to the issues of women's equality, identity and welfare. Swamiji was keen to restore women their status not only of their Divine Mother, but also the perfect human being and first manifestation of God. He felt that women have enormous patience, endurance love and devotion. He wanted Indian women to be free in all respects whether physical, mental or spiritual. He would like the Indian women to have the intellectuality of the west but not at the cost of her purity. He believed that the total freedom and independence of women would turn India into a race of superwomen and supermen. In this connection the statement of Sister Christine is significant to recall, "Some of us believe that if Swami Vivekananda's ideas regarding the education of women are carried out in true spirit, a being will be evolved who will be unique in the history of the world."

After India attained independence in 1947, the University Education Commission was created to recommend suggestions to improve the quality of education. However, their report spoke against female education, referring to it as: "Women's present education is entirely irrelevant to the life they have to lead. It is not only a waste but often a definite disability." In 1958, a national committee on women's education was appointed by the then government, and most of its recommendations were accepted. The crux of its recommendations was to bring female education on the same footing as offered for boys. Soon afterward, committees were created that talked about equality between men and women in the field of education. For example, one committee on differentiation of curricula for boys and girls (1959) recommended equality and a common curriculum at various stages of their learning. Further efforts were made to expand the education system, and the Education Commission was set up in 1964, which largely talked about female education, which recommended a national policy to be developed by the government. This occurred in 1968, providing increased emphasis on female education. Present Position of Women education in Independent India, education acquired special significance and has been supported by the government from time to time through its policies and programmes. Therefore, in recent years the Education system has expanded rapidly. But still a large number of women are in dark and the gender gap in literacy rate remains starting by its presence.

According to him, the Indian society had not yet lost the plot. He was hopeful of women being capable of equipping themselves with the required resources to be able to actively contribute to the development of society. About his contemporary times, he stated that, "Women in statesmanship, managing territories, governing countries, even making war, have proved themselves equal to men – if not superior. In India, I have no doubt of that. Whenever they have had the opportunity, they have proved that they have as much ability as men, with this advantage – that they seldom degenerate.

References

1. Kanta Grover, *Burning Flesh*, New Delhi, 1990, p-9
2. Swami Tapasyananda, *Sri Ramkrishna: Life and Teachings*, Madras Ramkrishna Math, 1986, p-87
3. Tucker, R.P, *Ranade and the Roots of Indian Nationalism*, Bombay, 1977, p-219

4. *Ibid*, at p. 8. Later on, Swami Vivekananda would go on to gratefully confess that, "I know that before I was born, my mother would fast and pray and do hundreds of things which I could not even do for five minutes. She did that for two years. I believe that whatever religious culture I have, I owe to that. It was consciously that my mother brought me into the world to be what I am. Whatever good impulse I have was given to me by my mother – and

consciously, not unconsciously.” Swami Vivekananda, “The Women of India” (Lecture delivered at Cambridge, December 17, 1894), Lectures and Discourses, Volume 9, Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda,

5. Swami Nikhilananda, *Vivekananda: A Biography*, New York, Ramakrishna, Vivekananda Center of New York, 1953, p.162.

6. Mazumdar, Vina (2002), ‘*Evolution of Women’s Studies in India. Dialogue with Researchers: Linking Policy and Research—A Consultation on Women’s Studies*’. New Delhi: Centre for Women’s Development Studies, pp 47-49.

7. Even to the Americans, Vivekananda had suggested once that their salvation was dependent on their women. Swami Vivekananda, “*The Women of India*” (Tribune, April 1, 1894), Reports in American Newspapers, Volume 3, Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda, Manjula, ‘*Swami Vivekananda and Modern Women*’, Samvit , Sept 2017,

8. Swami Vivekananda, “*Ideals of Womanhood*” (Brooklyn Standard Union, January 21, 1895), Reports in American Newspapers, Volume 2, Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda, https://www.ramakrishnavivekananda.info/vivekananda/volume_2/reports_in_american_newspapers/ideals_of_womanhood.htm. The Swami believed that the earliest system of marriage and the corresponding societal structure in the Vedic era was ‘a matriarchal one’, with the mother placed at the Centre of the system. However, the rise of Buddhism and strict monastic cultures led to the degradation of the societal position of women as they were chosen as the first targets to be blamed for any deviations from monasticism.

In one of his interviews, he explicitly stated the present inferior position of Indian women to be a result of the influence of Buddhism. He also cautioned, “But we should not allow the sudden influx of European criticism and our consequent sense of contrast to make us acquiesce too readily in this notion of the inequality of our women. Circumstances have forced upon us, for many centuries, the woman’s need of protection. This, and not her inferiority, is the true reading of our customs.” Swami Vivekananda, “*On Indian Women – Their Past, Present and Future*” (Prabuddha Bharata, December, 1898), Interviews, Volume 5, Complete Works of Swami

9. Swami Vivekananda, “*Hints on Practical Spirituality*” (Delivered at the Home of Truth, Los Angeles, California), Volume 2, Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda,

10. However, one may note that the Swami was never apologetic about quoting from the Hindu sacred texts, although he was aware of certain parts of the texts which did not confer women equal status in society. But he had his reasons for quoting the positive parts of the texts:

“I have often heard that there are other passages where women are condemned. I admit that in our sacred books there are many passages that condemn women as offering temptation; you can see that for yourselves. But there are also passages that glorify women as the power of God. And there are other passages which state that in that house where one drop of a woman’s tear falls, the gods are never pleased and the house goes to ruin. Drinking wine, killing a woman, and killing a Brahmin are the highest crimes in the Hindu religion. I admit there are condemnatory sentences [in some of our books]; but here I claim the superiority of these Hindu books, for in the books of other races there is only condemnation and no good word for a woman.” Swami Vivekananda, “The Women of India” (Lecture delivered at Cambridge, December 17, 1894), Lectures and Discourses, Volume 9, Complete Works of Swami

11. Swami Vivekananda, “*The Women of India*” (Lecture delivered at Cambridge, December 17, 1894), Lectures and Discourses, Volume 9, Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda.

12. Vivekananda, *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Calcutta, Advaita Ashrama, 1972-78, VoI-V, p-26

13. Ibid, Vol-V, p-232,
14. He proposed education as a medium for the upliftment of all the marginalized people. Dev, Milton Kumar 'Vivekananda and the Renaissance of Bengal', Philosophy and Progress, Vols. LVII-LVIII, 2015, p. 100.
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