



Research Paper

## Educational Relevance of Epistemological Constructs of Swami Vivekananda in 21<sup>st</sup> Century

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### Abstract

This study is analytical and review-based in nature, where related literature regarding the educational thoughts of Swami Vivekananda have been collected from various sources particularly on his epistemological constructs and critically analysed to derive its relevance in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The philosophical ideas of Vivekananda include metaphysical, epistemological and axiological constructs as a whole covering different aspect like: idea on God, broad vision of religion, humanism, optimism, socialism, respect for women, freedom and mukti, practical ideology. The study revealed that Vivekananda highly emphasized religion, mind, experience, self-analysis, perceptions of facts, hypo-inductive etc. as the important sources of discovery of knowledge. The analysis of above epistemological constructs reveals that much more emphasis in curriculum should be given to the discovery of knowledge, not on the acquisition or creation of knowledge, focus should be on how the learners can know themselves well. From the critical analysis of epistemological constructs, holistic education, experiential learning, interactive education, value-based education, practical education, motivation and inspiration, integration of body, mind and spirit as methods of teachers were derived. The study also revealed that NEP-2020 document of Government of India also emphasized the educational thoughts of Vivekananda, which reveals its significance in present context.

**Keywords:** Swami Vivekananda; Epistemology; Discovery of Knowledge; Curriculum Construction

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### I. Introduction

There was a time in our country when the cultural values and deep-rooted civilization of India were crushed under the western civilization and highly influenced by materialism and different factors, in that time Swami Vivekananda took the lead with no material possession. His full name was Narendranath Dutta, who was born to Vishwanath Dutta and Bhuvaneshwari Devi on 12<sup>th</sup> January 1863. As a youth he was taking part in many activities like boxing, wrestling, body-building, gymnastics, swimming, riding etc. from his childhood days. He wandered almost all parts of the country, came in close contact with people, observed the socio-economic and political condition of the Indian people. Though ancient political, cultural and spiritual glory and glamour illumined his eyes incessantly, the then terrible poverty and terrific misery of people caused his soul burn in agony. His heart was pulsating with the suffering of people. When he swam across the sea to a rock off the South coast, he sat on deep meditation on the past, present and the future of India and causes of her degeneration and the means of her resurrection. A vision came to him that India has a mission in the determined to go as a mission to the western countries to preach the ancient wisdom of India and essence of Vedanta. The memory of Vivekananda was so strong that even he was able to remember the contents of any book after first reading. He is famous not only in India, but also in the globe. His devotion towards the betterment of mankind is really praiseworthy both in Indian and western context. He believed in spiritual perspectives and Vedanta philosophy to a great extent, so he emphasized spiritual education in general. He has contributed a lot for the national consciousness to Hindus about national development and spiritual knowledge. His philosophical thoughts are having wide educational implications throughout the globe even in this present context. The metaphysical constructs of Swami Vivekananda reveal that every child possesses inherent abilities for accomplishing the desired goals. In this regard, the concept of education is defined by Vivekananda as the manifestation of divine perfections already existing in man. In the same way, the analysis of epistemological assumptions of Vivekananda reveals that all knowledge is within us which comes from the mind, he says every individual

discovers knowledge from his own mind, so knowledge is inherent within us. The epistemological constructs are based on the sources of gathering knowledge, where he gives emphasis on the discovery of existing knowledge rather than creation of knowledge. He has prescribed different means of discovering knowledge where he emphasizes on practical religion, experience, concentration of mind, perception, hypothetico-into-deductive approach, self-realization, practical utility, understanding human nature, so on and so forth. He says that knowledge cannot be created, but be discovered, knowledge does not come when we scarify something for something else, true knowledge come with worshipping and knowing the Atman. He believes that only knowledge makes us free, no other actions give us freedom, in this way he says about the fore-fold-path to attain freedom and muktiviz: work, worship, contemplation and knowledge. He states that knowledge come from the human soul, no knowledge comes from nature or something else, it is within human being. The analysis of the ideas of Vivekananda from epistemological perspectives it is vivid that he was a practical Vedantist and according to him curriculum should satisfy the material and spiritual needs of the mankind. The epistemological ideas reflect on and curriculum and indicates combination of science and Vedanta, language, study of social science, vocational education, study of fine art, music, painting etc. in the curriculum. So, in this 21<sup>st</sup> century the epistemological ideas of Vivekananda are highly relevant as the primary focus in on self-realization (Gohain et al., 2022). This conceptual paper focuses on the critical analysis of the epistemological constructs of Swami Vivekananda and the educational significance of the same with reference to curriculum construction in this present era.

Several studies revealed the educational implications and relevance of Vivekananda's philosophy. Nithiya (2012) studied Vivekananda's views regarding philosophy of education and it revealed that education is the most important instrument which facilitates the development and progress of the humanity and also for developing nation. Raul (2013) undertook a study on Vivekananda's philosophy and reveled that so far as the concept of nation and education are concerned education plays most important role and acts as the backbone for the overall development of nation. Sarkar (2015) critically examined the philosophical thoughts of Vivekananda and advocated that the educational thoughts are highly relevant to the present context for fulfilling standards and demands in an easier way for the development of nation and mankind. Gupta (2017) undertook a study comparative views of Vivekananda and Aravinda Rishi and found that education is such a weapon for establishing a true foundation for the development of society. Garg (2018) examined the life philosophy and teachings of Vivekananda and made it clear that real education empowers people to gain independency for fulfilling needs in the society. Radha (2019) studied about the mission of Vivekananda as man making education and made it clear that for the development of the nation character formation and man making are the most important requirement. Takuldar (2020) did a study relating to life and philosophy of Vivekananda and revealed the importance of true education of the inner self of the individuals for the solutions of different problems relating to society and globe as a whole. Saha et al., (2021) undertook an investigation on Vedanta philosophy and Vivekananda and revealed the significance of Vedanta philosophy as reflected in the thoughts of Vivekananda; and also the study highlighted the relevance of Vedanta for developing sustainable life. Bhat (2021) critically evaluated the educational philosophy of Vivekananda and revealed a combination of ideologies of the 'East and West, religion and science, past and present' in the field of education. Gohain et al., (2022) investigated the relevance of educational philosophy of Vivekananda and revealed high relevance in present context for the development of mankind and nation too. Similar studies regarding the educational philosophy of Vivekananda have been undertaken by researchers across the globe, but less number of studies has covered the epistemological perspectives of Vivekananda which have implications for curriculum and construction and methods of teaching. So, the present analytical study has been taken into account.

## **II. Methodology**

This study is analytical and review-based in nature, where related literature regarding the educational thoughts of Swami Vivekananda have been collected from various sources particularly on his epistemological constructs and critically analysed to derive its relevance in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The research studies related to the educational thoughts of Vivekananda were only included for critical analysis following inclusion and exclusion criteria. The primary objective of the present study was to critically analyse the epistemological constructs of Vivekananda and derive its significance for curriculum construction in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The study dealt with the answers of following research questions.

**Q1.** What are the philosophical ideas of Vivekananda?

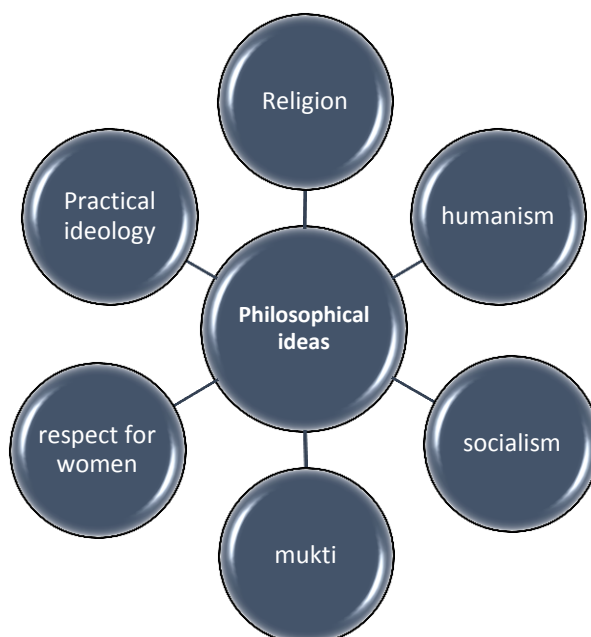
**Q2.** What are the epistemological constructs of Vivekananda?

**Q3.** What is the relevance of thoughts and epistemological constructs of Vivekananda?

The collected and selected literature were critically analysed the answers of these questions were found out, which are discussed below.

### **III. Philosophical Ideas of Vivekananda**

The philosophical ideas of Vivekananda include metaphysical, epistemological and axiological constructs as a whole covering different aspect like: idea on god, broad vision of religion, humanism, optimism, socialism, respect for women, freedom and mukti, practical ideology. The following diagram represents all these things (Saha et al., 2021).



**Figure-1: Philosophical ideas of Vivekananda**

Vivekananda was a strong propagator of supremacy of almighty God. He considered God as omnipotent, omniscient and omnipresent; also believed man as incarnation of God. He had a broad outlook about religion, he was a real secularist. He was the fan of Vedantic concept of equality of humanity. He had an implicit faith in the welfare of mankind. He considered worship of man as the real worship of God. He realized the dignity and divinity in man. He was a spritualist, he inspired the young by encouraging sprituality in them. He was a staunch lover of ‘in’, which refers to ‘everything is within an indivisual’, so he was saying that all strength is within the individual himself. He wanted to make an end to the class system and caste conflicts going on through out the ages and begin a new era on egalitarian and equality being as a sociolst. He he attached a great deal to women, he considered the development of nation with the development of women. In order to attain freedom or mukti, he suggested four-fold-path viz: work, worship, contemplation and knowledge (Garg, 2018).

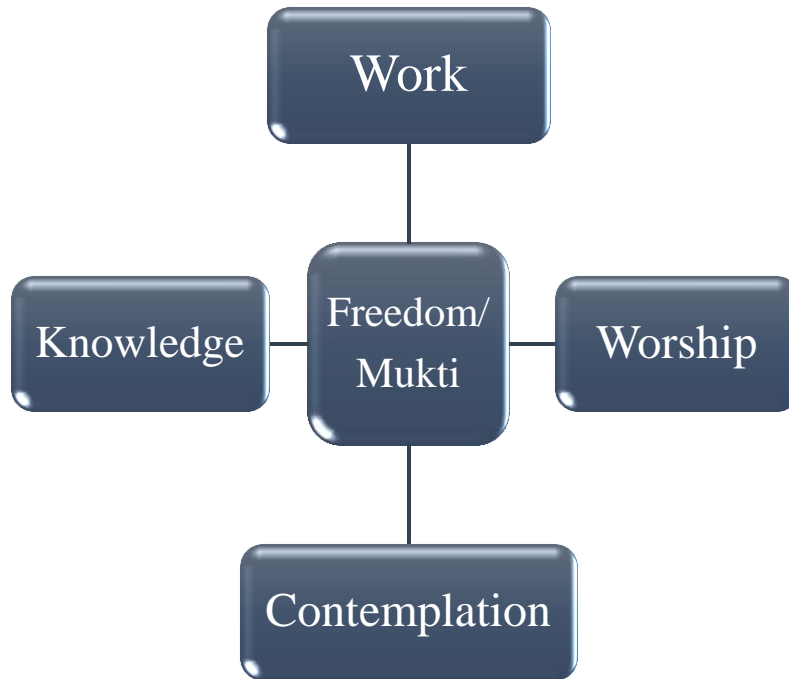


Figure-2: Four-fold path

Vivekananda opined that in order to attain salvation a man can pursue any one or more yogas according to his background. Although he was a spiritualist in the true sense, but he beautifully blended spiritualism with science and technology for wellbeing of man.

#### IV. Epistemological Constructs of Vivekananda:

If we analyse the educational thoughts of different thinkers with reference to the definitions of education, then we can find two contradictory statements, where, in one hand it is mentioned that child's mind is empty, when he/she is born, it receives knowledge and information in its growth. On the other hand, some agree with the above explanations and state that everything is within a child, the child needs appropriate environment for the realization of self. So, Vivekananda was in the second category, where he emphasized self-realization. The epistemological constructs of the philosophy of Vivekananda reveal about the knowledge and its sources for discovery and enrichment. He says that knowledge is within us, in our mind, there is no need to construct knowledge, knowledge can only be discovered as it is inherited (Bhat, 2021; Saha et al., 2021; Talukdar, 2020; Gohain et al., 2022). However, Vivekananda emphasized the following constructs for the discovery of knowledge;

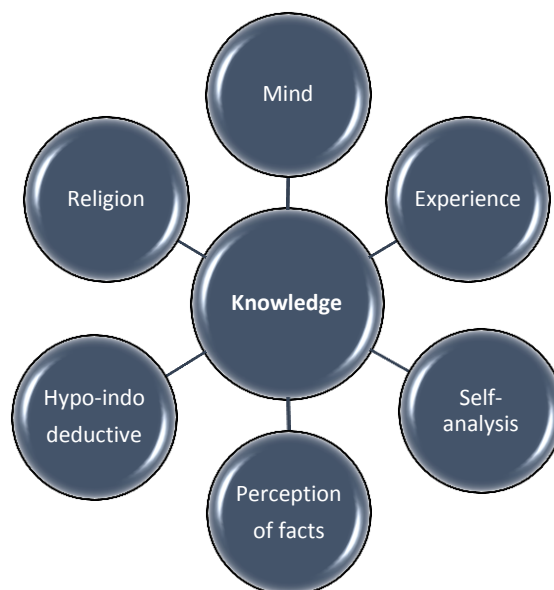
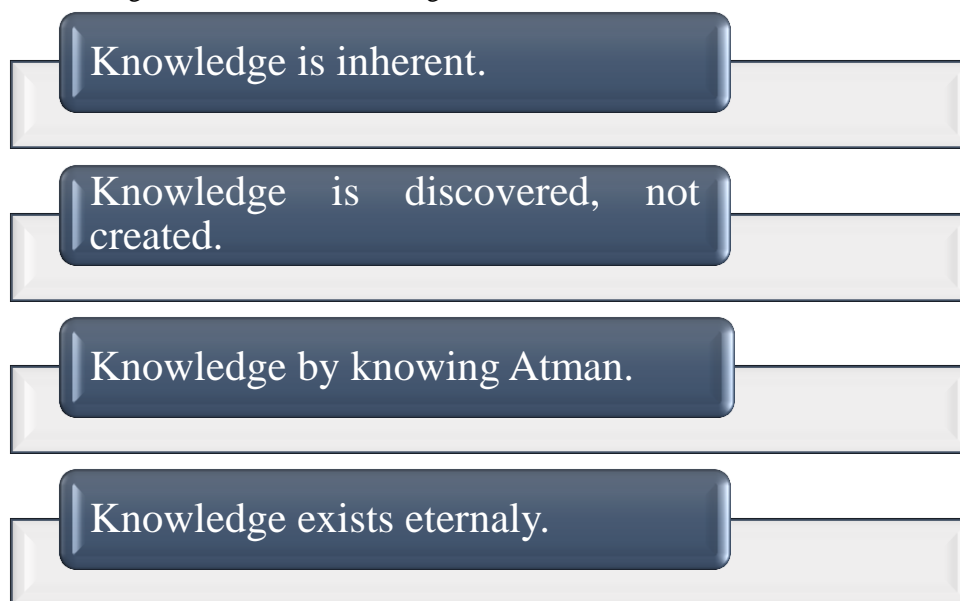


Figure-3: Epistemological Constructs of Vivekananda

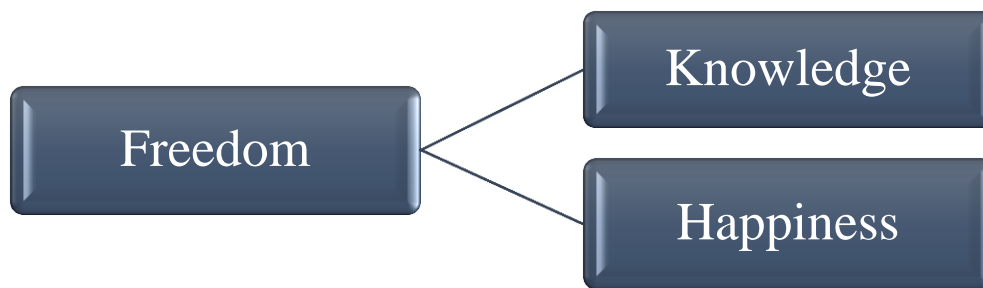
According to Vivekananda, all the knowledge is a part of religion, because knowledge is highly influenced by religious perspectives. Experience is one of the greatest source of knowledge, where by all the human beings proceed their knowledge out of their life experiences. In the field of knowledge, the individual mind plays a vital role, which basically needs to be calm and cool mind. He believed that knowledge is ultimately related to Veda, so he considered knowledge as Veda. He believed that all the knowledge is within the human mind, means knowledge comes out from human mind and as a result something new in the form of ideas or object is discovered. Knowledge is closely concerned with the perception of facts which helps to build up the reasoning of human beings. He considered mind as the infinite library of the universe, wherever knowledge the human beings receive those come from their mind, so mind is the most powerful weapon for the discovery of knowledge. The knowledge of human being is based on experience, which is regarded as inferential knowledge where we mainly follow inductive (particular to general) and deductive (general to particular) approach on the basis of the experience. That's why Vivekananda considered experience as one of the best source of knowledge. He also emphasized freedom in the field of discovery of knowledge. He believed that if a person is bound and he/she thinks that he is bound, that means at that time he makes his own bondage; on the other hand, if he thinks that he is free, that means he is free to do what he wants, so this is the knowledge, considered as knowledge of freedom, which is the goal of nature.



**Figure-4: Characteristics of true knowledge**

Swami Vivekananda opined that all kind of knowledge is within the individual, there is no need to create or construct knowledge, no knowledge comes from outside, it is all inside the human beings. For example: people say Newton discovered the theory of gravitation, where it is vivid that it was there in his mind prior to the discovery of the same, the time came and he found out it with a scientific name. So, from this it can be said that all knowledge that the people of the world has ever received comes from their mind, therefore, mind is considered as the infinite library of the universe. When Newton was sitting under a tree, the falling of an apple gave him suggestion to study his own mind, where he rearranged all the previous knowledge, established relations of the thoughts and discovered new link, ultimately the theory of gravitation came out, but it was there. Knowledge may be secular or spiritual, but it is in the human mind, in many cases it is not discovered due to certain reasons, but it remains covered; and the covering becomes disappear gradually we think that we are learning.

He says that knowledge can be got in one way that is not by the experience, it does not come by sacrifice, but it comes by seeking, worshipping and realizing our Atman. Further, knowledge is eternal in nature, which exists eternally. If a person discovers spiritual truth, we call him as 'inspired', and whatever he brings to the society that is revelation. So, it can be said that revelation may come to any man who has willingness for the same. Vivekananda strongly believed in self-realization in defining the concept of God, he says God is man., he also says that knowledge is God Himself.



**Figure-5: Conception of knowledge, happiness and freedom**

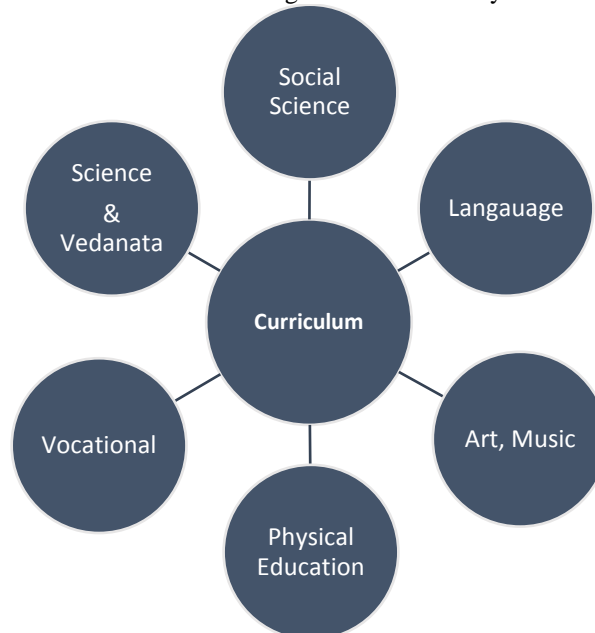
Vivekananda says that the first end of human life is knowledge and the second end is happiness, and both the knowledge and happiness lead to freedom. In this way there is interconnection among freedom, knowledge and happiness. The goal of all is the knowledge of self or the realization of self. There is no knowledge in nature; all knowledge comes from the human soul, where the human beings manifest it and discover within themselves. Understanding human nature is the highest knowledge.

Swami Vivekananda played a significant role in bringing the Indian ideas of yoga and Vedanta to the West (Saha et al., 2021). His ideas had a strong foundation in Hindu philosophy, especially Vedanta, and had a significant impact on the development of Indian nationalism and contemporary Hinduism. Among the philosophical concepts linked to Swami Vivekananda are the following:

- **Philosophy of Vedanta:** The Upanishads' principles are the foundation of Vedanta, which Swami Vivekananda preached widespread. According to Vedanta, the universal soul (Brahman) and the individual soul (Atman) are ultimately one. Vivekananda highlighted the significance of experiencing this connection firsthand rather than just intellectually.
- **Jyana Yoga:** The road of knowledge, or Jyana Yoga, was promoted by Vivekananda. This method holds that enlightenment can be attained via the pursuit of knowledge.
- **Karma Yoga:** The path of selfless action was also advocated by Vivekananda. His belief was that spiritual progress might be achieved by carrying out one's responsibilities without concern for the outcome. One can purify the mind and eventually achieve liberation by doing selflessly and dedicating the results of those activities to a greater ideal.
- **Bhakti Yoga:** The path of devotion, Bhakti Yoga, is significant, as Swami Vivekananda highlighted. He considered a potent path to spiritual experience to be devotion to a personal god or ideal. Vivekananda frequently discussed the need of having love and devotion for the divine because he believed that this would lead to transcendental experiences.
- **Service to humankind:** Vivekananda trusted in the guideline of administration to mankind as a type of love. He accentuated the significance of magnanimous assistance (Seva) to the less lucky and underestimated segments of society. As per him, serving others was an ethical obligation as well as a method for understanding the heavenly inside oneself.
- **Harmony of religion:** Master Vivekananda proliferated the possibility of strict resistance and congruity. He accepted that all religions are ways to the very truth and that people ought to regard and value the variety of strict convictions and practices. Vivekananda's well known discourse at the Parliament of the World's Religions in 1893 in Chicago stressed this message of comprehensiveness and acknowledgment.
- **Inner strength and confidence:** Vivekananda emphasized developing inner strength and self-confidence among scholars by encouraging them to realize and understand their potentials and to have faith in themselves. Vivekananda's teachings often focused on building self-reliance and self-esteem, which he believed were essential for personal and spiritual growth.

## V. Relevance of Epistemological Constructs of Vivekananda

The epistemology branch of philosophy deals with the theory and sources of knowledge from a theoretical point of view, but from educational point of view the epistemology provides implications for curriculum construction (Gohain et al., 2022), as curriculum included the sum total of the experiences of the human being. The analysis of above epistemological constructs reveals that much more emphasis in curriculum should be given to the discovery of knowledge, not on the acquisition or creation of knowledge, focus should be on how the learners can know themselves well (Bhat, 2021; Gohain et al., 2022). As a practical Vedantist he had implicit faith in man, so he favoured curriculum having elements to satisfy material and spiritual needs of man.



**Figure-6: Curriculum Construction**

Vivekananda believed that in order to bring about all round development in child's personality, there is a need of blending science and vedanta, which indicated that curriculum should be embedded with the study of religion, theology, philosophy and vedanta as a whole. According to him, different languages are to be taught to students through which they can establish a common communication of ideas among people.

Swami Vivekananda's educational ideology remains very relevant in the 21<sup>st</sup> century due to his emphasis on all-round development, practical education and integration of modern knowledge with spiritual values (Gohain et al., 2022).

Some important aspects of Vivekananda's educational philosophy and their relevance today are: **Holistic Education:** Vivekananda emphasized the importance of holistic education, focusing on the development of not only the intellectual abilities but also the physical, emotional and spiritual aspects of an individual. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, there is growing recognition of the need for education to nurture the whole person, including mental health, emotional intelligence and moral values.

➤ **Practical Learning:** Vivekananda advocates a practical and experiential system of education that enables students to apply their knowledge in real life situations. This is in line with modern educational methods such as project-based learning, experiential learning, and internships, which emphasize real-world experiences and problem-solving skills.

➤ **Character Building:** Vivekananda emphasized the importance of character building and moral education in addition to study. In today's rapidly changing and often competitive world, the renewed focus is on promoting ethical values, empathy and integrity in education to prepare students to become citizens and responsible leadership role.

➤ **Integration of science and spirituality:** Vivekananda believed in the integration of scientific knowledge with spiritual wisdom. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, there is increasing recognition of the connection between science, spirituality and holistic well-being. An education that integrates both scientific research and spiritual principles can help students develop a deeper understanding of themselves and the world around them.

➤ **Individuality and Self-Expression:** Vivekananda valued the uniqueness of each individual and emphasized the importance of self-expression and self-discovery in education. In today's increasingly diverse

and multicultural societies, it is necessary to establish educational systems that respect and celebrate individual differences, promoting creativity, critical thinking and innovation.

➤ **Service Oriented Education:** Vivekananda believes that education not only benefits the individual but also contributes to the welfare of society. In the 21st century, there is an increasing emphasis on service learning, community engagement and social responsibility in education, helping students become active participants in solving societal challenges, environmental and global.

➤ **Global Citizen:** Vivekananda's vision of education transcends national borders, emphasizing the importance of global understanding and cooperation.

In a connected world, there is a need for an education that promotes intercultural competence, empathy and cooperation across diverse cultures and perspectives. Overall, Swami Vivekananda's reflections on education continue to offer valuable insights and guidance for creating an educational system that promotes the holistic development of individuals, nurturing ethical values, promotes social responsibility and prepares students to thrive in the complexities of the 21st century.

Renowned Indian philosopher and spiritual guide Swami Vivekananda placed a strong emphasis on holistic education, which supports a person's mental, physical, and spiritual development. Although he didn't explicitly provide any teaching strategies, his ideas and teachings can be used as inspiration for other kinds of instruction (Gupta, 2017; Radha, 2019; Garg, 2018). The following important methods of teaching, which may be drawn from Vivekananda's teachings.

➤ **Holistic Method:** Vivekananda was a proponent of an individual's holistic development, which includes their mental, bodily, and spiritual growth. Instructors can implement pedagogical approaches that support students' holistic development, such as engaging them in physical activities, stimulating their minds with discussions and debates, and incorporating spiritual practices like meditation or ethical teachings.

➤ **Learning via Experience:** Vivekananda placed a strong emphasis on experiential learning. To assist students better, comprehend ideas, teachers might use experiential learning techniques including experiments, field excursions, and hands-on activities.

➤ **Interactive Education:** Vivekananda promoted engagement and communication during the educational process. Teachers may include students in the learning process by using instructional strategies including debates, role-plays, and group discussions.

➤ **Customization:** Vivekananda was a strong proponent of adjusting education to meet the requirements and skills of each individual learner, acknowledging their uniqueness. In order to accommodate the various learning styles and capacities of their pupils, teachers might implement individualized teaching strategies.

➤ **Value-based Education:** Vivekananda highlighted the significance of moral principles and character development in education. By incorporating value-based education into their lesson plans, educators may highlight values like self-control, compassion, and honesty.

➤ **Practical Application:** Vivekananda promoted education with real-world applications. Educators can illustrate the practical applications of information through their teaching techniques by using case studies, real-life examples, and problem-solving exercises.

➤ **Inspiration & Motivation:** Vivekananda was a strong proponent of encouraging and inspiring pupils to reach their greatest potential. Instructors can use motivational speaking, sharing inspirational tales, offering support and encouragement, and other instructional strategies to motivate their students.

➤ **Integration of Mind, Body and Spirit:** Vivekananda stressed the integration of the mind, body, and spirit in education. Teachers can adopt teaching methods that promote physical well-being (e.g., yoga or physical exercises), mental stimulation (e.g., intellectual discussions), and spiritual development (e.g., meditation or ethical teachings).



## **VI. Discussion and Conclusion**

The concepts of Swami Vivekananda are infinite, limitless, and they affect every person on the planet. His ideas, messages, and teachings are appealing to all people. It would be improper and impossible to limit their significance to any particular period or location. Swami Ji was a member of the human race. He was a fervent supporter of world peace and harmony. His boundless thoughts strike the recipient's spirit like a lightning since they come directly from his own. These well considered concepts are part of universal knowledge because they deal with aspects of intelligence, emotions, impulses, and dispositions that are inherent in human nature. As a result, Swami Vivekananda's ideas are timeless and applicable in all places. These are the outcome of his profound understanding, his boundless compassion for people, and his care. The more general philosophy of life gave rise to Vivekananda's philosophy of knowing. It is deeply rooted in inclusivity and tolerance. The boundaries of reasonable knowledge have been crossed when considering the great saint. Through inner vision and inner intuitive experience, he descended far within himself and found the inner self and inner union. Witnessing the wretched state of the Indian people, Swami Ji's heart bled with anguish and despair. He thought about how to uplift the oppressed and the impoverished. He thought that by arousing their consciences, these people may become more powerful. The lassitude and lack of drive among the Indians deeply touched him. It was specifically targeted to Indian youngsters by Swami Vivekananda. Every living thing is seen by Swami Vivekananda as a celestial creature. He asserts that the purpose of life is to become aware of and manifest this divine nature via the practice of yoga. Vivekananda's timeless principles result in a useful life philosophy. The human soul is enlivened by the ideas and ideals of Vivekananda. His words powerfully awaken one's inner being, instilling in them a strong will to know oneself, to resist all ills, and an inner bravery to resist temptation, intolerance, bigotry, and social injustice at all costs. Swami Ji's teachings are still relevant today, as India is once again committed to fighting poverty and doing everything within its power to improve the lives of the underprivileged, women, and other weaker groups. The analysis of present education system revealed some unexpected results like incompetency, unemployment, corruption, gaps in knowledge and skills, theory-based teaching, digital divide etc. (Sirswal, 2014). Bharadwaj & Pradeep (2023) conducted a study on the futuristic perspectives of thoughts of Vivekananda and derived the strength, weakness, opportunities and challenges from the educational thoughts. The study made it clear that Vivekananda's educational thoughts have implications for nation building, personality development, women empowerment etc. but it also needs intellectually high level enthusiastic teachers for the implementations in present context. Although it has wide policy implications for all levels of education in accordance with NEP-2020, still it may be a challenge to synthesize NEP-2020 and making education in Indian context. So, in this regard there is a need to restructure education by reforming curriculum and methods of teaching as reflected from the epistemological constructs. While the methods, principles and curriculum are derived from Vivekananda's teachings, it's essential to adapt teaching methods and prepare curriculum according to the specific context and needs of students and educational settings.

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