Among all the social philosophers of modern times Vivekananda proved to be the foremost in understanding the value of womanhood as the bedrock of human civilization. He was proud of belonging to a culture with a long tradition of respecting the womanhood. His views on womanhood sourced off from India’s cultural past. How much was the respect India gave to its women folk has already been dealt with at length and it was this tradition of respecting woman that shaped Swami Vivekananda’s attitude to women. The importance woman held in Indian families was so much that she more than anybody else made her presence felt in every sphere. And the importance Vivekananda gave to womanhood is thus well expressed in one of the quotes from him an American newspaper published:

*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, ‘Sabatimini (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.*
The man and wife together offered 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.¹

He was very much influenced by the tradition of India’s gifted women who were intellectually and spiritually enlightened. It is interesting to take note of his disciple Sister Nivedita’s views on Indian woman which was principally shaped by Vivekananda. Thus goes Nivedita’s sublime views on Indian woman:

For thousands of years must Indian women have risen with the light to perform the Salutation of the Threshold. Thousands of years of simplicity and patience, like that of the peasant, like that of the grass, speak in the beautiful rite. It is this patience of woman that makes civilizations. It is this patience of the Indian woman, with this her mingling of a larger power of reverie, that has made and makes the Indian nationality.²

INDIAN IDEAL OF WOMANHOOD

Woman being one of the cornerstones of cultural progress, the Swami had carried India’s message on the Ideal of womanhood throughout the length and breadth of the world to highlight Indian culture. It is mentioned already that woman is the centre around whom the whole Indian family revolves and
attains well being and harmonious development. According to him woman characters presented in ancient Indian literature were embodiments of real womanhood that formed an element of inspiration for generations of women to come. Citing the examples of women characters of Ithihasas and Puranas, he highlighted the roles the Indian woman played to selflessly fulfill her duties or *Dharma* at different stages of life. He would wax eloquent on Sita, the central woman character in Ramayana and exhort Indian women to make Sita their role model. Because,

*She is the very type of the true Indian woman, for all the Indian ideals of a perfect woman have grown out of that one life of Sita; and here she stands these thousands of years, commanding the worship of every man, woman and child throughout the length and breadth of the land or Aryavarta.*

**IDEAL OF MOTHERHOOD**

Inspired by the culture of India which regarded woman as embodiment of Divine Mother, he taught the world to respect the ideal of motherhood in every woman. Giving a talk on *The Ideals of Indian Women* he once expressed his ideal of womanhood through highlighting the ideal of motherhood. His ideas on womanhood highly impressed the world woman community. Thus writes Mrs. Bull:
So much impressed was the gathering of Cambridge women with the Swami’s address that in the time of the approaching Christmas they sent, unknown to the Swami himself, the following letter to his mother, in-far off India, together with a beautiful picture of the Child Jesus in the lap of the Virgin Mary.

She continues:

*His generous service to men, women, children in our midst was laid at your feet by him, in an address he gave us the other day on the Ideals of Motherhood in India. The worship of his mother will be to all who heard him an inspiration and an uplift.*

The Swami was proud of India’s family and social system which held aloft the idea of womanhood which saw itself expressed in all walks of Indian life. He opines:

*In India the mother is the centre of the family and our highest ideal. She is to us the representative of God, as God is the mother of the Universe. It was a female sage who first found the unity of God, and laid down this doctrine in one of the first hymns of the Vedas. Our God is both personal and absolute, the absolute is male, the personal, female. And thus it comes*
that we now say: ‘The first manifestation of God is the hand that rocks the cradle.’ He is of the Aryan race, who is born through prayer, and he is a non-Aryan, who is born through sensuality.”

He believed that the dynamic character present in a woman rests on that she is mother, mother of the family guiding and controlling the household affairs and catering to the needs of all the family members. According to Vivekananda “the ideal woman in India is the mother, the mother first, and the mother last.” The feminine grace in each woman gets perfection with her becoming a mother. In Indian tradition, each woman’s ambition is to become a mother by cultivating the unique qualities of motherhood in her very character. “Mother represents colourless love that knows no barter, love that never dies. Who can have such love? Only mother, not son, nor daughter, nor wife.”

He disagreed with the popular concept that woman becomes mother only by giving birth to a child. He believed that the ideal of motherhood depends on the qualities like love, sacrifice, responsibility, compassion and tireless service. He often quoted the example of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa’s wife Sri Sarada Devi, who was to him the ‘Holy mother’ par excellence in her illuminating the ideal of motherhood through her life. Without losing her individuality, the holy mother had kept her mind and body so pure and had
developed a harmonious progress in her personality through leading a life with love, dedication, sympathy, renunciation and sacrifice. With these innate qualities became the mother of the disciples of her husband. Even Sri Ramakrishna had identified her as symbolizing the motherhood. Once massaging his legs Sarada devi asked her husband how he felt it, Ramakrishna told her, “The mother who is in the temple, the mother who gave birth to this body and now resides in the Nahabat – it is the same Mother who is now massaging my feet. Truly, I always look upon you as a form of the blissful Divine Mother.”

Vivekananda himself had mentioned about her motherly affection towards him and other young disciples of her husband at many instances in his life. The death of Sri Ramakrishna had made the life of his young disciples miserable and Sarada Devi was very much worried of this. She would often pray to her departed husband,

'O Lord, You came in human form, sported with the devotees, and went away! Should everything end with that? When then was the need to come and undergo so much suffering? I saw in Varanasi and Vrindavan many sadhus who get their food by begging, and shift their residence from the shade of one tree to that of another. There is no dearth of sadhus of that type. I cannot any more to my children, who have given up everything
for your sake, going from door to door for food. I pray that those who renounce the world in your name may never be in need of at least coarse food and clothing. They will live together, taking your name and holding to your ideas and ideals; and people afflicted with the sufferings of the world will resort to them and get relief by hearing your teachings from them. Was this not what you really came for? I am greatly pained at heart to see them wandering about like this! 

Her maternal affection encircled within it the people who lived around her. To her the world was a single home (Vasudhaivakudumbakom) and her universal maternal love cut across all barriers of caste, creed or religion. Five days before her demise she told a devotee, usually referred as A’s mother. “… one thing I tell you – if you want peace, my daughter, don’t find fault with others, but find fault rather with yourself. Learn to make the world your own. Nobody is a stranger, my dear, the world is yours.” She was, as Ramakrishna said, Universal Motherhood epitomized.

WESTERN IDEAL OF WOMANHOOD

He often highlighted the greatness of Indian womanhood comparing it with that of the Western countries. In his Boston lecture on the religion and customs of India he as Lawrence Evening Tribune remarked “He did not hesitate to criticize adversely some Western customs, especially some
connected with the position of woman bringing it in comparison with the moral and behavioural pattern of women in Indian tradition.”

According to him western families were wife oriented whereas the Indian families were mother ruled. He was highly critical of the absence of spiritual oneness between partners in western families where there existed only a mere physical relationship between men and women. He viewed western women as the mirror images of men with physical strength and lack of both mental and spiritual strength in them. Though he made an attempt to compare Indian and western women, he never judged them with Indian standard of womanhood. He believed that each and every nation has its own tradition and culture and it is unfair to judge the people of another country with one’s own standards. “The great lesson to learn is that I am not the standard by which the whole universe is to be judged; each man is to be judged by his own idea, each race by its own standard and ideal, each custom of each country by its own reasoning and conditions”, he said.

He was not against the social and intellectual progress of women in India, but strongly contented that it should be by preserving their individuality and cultivating faith in them. He believed that women will be fit enough to hand over the Nation’s cultural heritage to the future generation only if they become fearless, faithful to one’s own self and preserve the grace of womanhood in their very character. In an interview to the Editor of *Prabuddha Bharata* in ‘on Indian Women- Their Past, Present And Future’
he said that India needed, “great fearless women- women worthy to continue
the tradition of Sanghamitra, Lila, Ahalya Bai, and Mira Bai – 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.” He suggested women
live guided by their inner voice, controlling their sense organs which helps
them cultivate the power of concentration, dedication and renunciation in
their work. “The great ideal of Indian womanhood was not romance but
renunciation”. He wished to see India bristling with women of character,
energetic and empowered women who were gems of chastity. Chastity, he
believed, was the golden feather on the cap of Indian womanhood. He
reminded the modern youth about the cultural heritage India preserved down
the millennia. India’s cultural greatness, he believed, has feminine chastity
as its bedrock and wanted that this be cherished if India is to survive. Hence
his exhortation,

“O India! Forget not that the ideal of thy womanhood is Sita,
Savitri, Damayanti; forget not that the God thou worshippest
is the great Ascetic of ascetics, the all-renouncing Shankara,
the Lord of Uma; forget not that thy marriage, thy wealth, thy
life are not for sense-pleasure, are not for thy individual
personal happiness; forget not that thou art born as a sacrifice
to the Mother’s altar; forget not that thy social order is but the
Vivekananda was unhappy with the low social and economic status of Indian women of his times. Centuries of foreign domination had deprived the Indian women of their freedom and safety and the consequent male domination had done away with whatever little freedom they enjoyed. Historical circumstances thus had woven cocoons of customs around them and narrowed their vision and scope of their potential. This was very much pitiable. And Vivekananda cautioned his countrymen to bail Indian women out of this veil of social darkness that would tarnish the very image of India and stunt its cultural growth. travelling his country north to south, he came across the tragic condition of the weak sections of India, women and the downtrodden common masses. “In India, there are two great evils. Trampling of women and grinding the poor through caste restriction,” he said. The news of the suicide of one of his own sisters that inconsolably pained him during his sojourn at Almora too made him more alert on the problems of Indian women. “Through this perspective of personal woe he seems to have been rudely awakened to the great problems of Indian womanhood”, wrote his disciples. Hence his mooting many ideas to defend the social, intellectual and spiritual rights and privileges of women and
liberate them from the bonds of hard and fast rules of the prevailing customs.

But he would not generalize women’s problems. Each woman has her own individual problems which the woman concerned alone could identify and solve. But she would be able to diagnose the problems and find the escape way only if the nation ensures their social, economic and spiritual freedom. And he was confident that the Indian women were capable enough to do this. Therefore he said, “Women will work out their 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.”

“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 as capable of doing it as any in the world”, he opined. According to Sundrararama Iyer,

_The Swami also declared himself sternly against all interference with the scriptural usages and injunctions in regard to the status and marriage of women. Women, like the lower classes and castes, must receive a Sanskrit education, imbibe the ancient spiritual culture, and realize in practice all the spiritual ideals of the Rishis; and then they would take into their hands all questions affecting their status and solve them in the light thrown on them by their knowledge of the truths of_
religion and by the enlightened perception of their needs and
requirements...²⁰

EMANCIPATION OF WOMEN

He cautioned his countrymen that the degenerate condition of women, who
consist the majority of India’s population, will surely affect the progress
of India. He believed that it is the social necessity of the nation to place them
in such a position that they could stand on their own feet and solve their day
to-day problems in their personal as well as in their social life by taking
remedial measures to raise their material, social, moral and spiritual status.
He also exhorted the Indians to attempt to raise the standards women’s
material and spiritual conditions rather than blame them for their disabilities.
Conversing with a disciple, Swamiji had expressed his worries over the poor
status of Indian women thus:

You always criticize the women, but say what have you done
for their uplift? Writing down Smritis etc., and binding them
by hard rules, the men have turned the women into mere
manufacturing machines! If you do not raise the women, who
are the embodiment of the Divine Mother, don’t think that you
have any other way to rise.²¹

Therefore he too worked hard to elevate the status of Indian women in
different walks of national life. Women power of a nation, he believed,
could contribute to its total potential and that it sublimates the very culture of the nation. Thus he wrote to his disciple, Haripada Mitra: “Do you know who is the real ‘Shakti-worshipper’? It is he who knows that God is the omnipresent force in the universe and sees in women the manifestation of that force”.  

22 He urged the need to better the condition of Indian women because only through their uplift the nation could attain true greatness, otherwise it would remain degenerate.

He had no disagreement with social reformation programme of his time. But he had reservations regarding the attitude of the reformers who had adopted Western means and methods which touched upon only the periphery. He believed that if the reformation is done on a peripheral level, then there are chances the eventual recurrence of the same problem in a different guise. To him a reformer should go deep into the root cause of the problems in order to help man to exterminate them. “He was not an enemy of social reform; on contrary, he himself yearned for reform: but it must come from within, not from outside India; it must be constructive, not destructive”.  

23 Again, addressing a gathering at Madras, he had mentioned his disagreement with the modern social reformers as. “They want to reform only in little bits. I want root and branch reform. Where we differ is in the method. Theirs is the method of destruction, mine is that of construction. I do not believe in reform; I believe in growth”,  

24 the Swami said.
He was of firm belief that until the nation could take some positive measures for the emancipation of women and concentrate on their holistic development, there would be least chance for it to gain any spiritual and material progress. He also stressed the necessity of making them aware of the potential energy within themselves through imparting spirituality to their personality, so that they can grow and expand in their way to development. Such a constructive reformation is possible only through providing them with physical, intellectual and spiritual help through the medium of ideal education and placing them in a position to find out their own destiny. As Sister Nivedita had mentioned about his view on Ideal education,

*He saw clearly enough that the ideal education would be one that should exercise the smallest possible influence for direct change on the social body as a whole. It would be that which should best enable every woman, in time to come, to resume into herself the greatness of all the women of the Indian past.*

**SPIRITUAL EDUCATION**

According to him if the society is ready to spiritually reform its women through imparting proper education to them, they would be fit enough to face the problems in their personal as well as social life with mental courage. In an interview to the Editor of *Prabuddha Bharata*, he claimed that Indian women “have many grave problems, but none that are
not to be solved by that magic word ‘education’.

India’s ancient scriptures did not forbid women from acquiring knowledge through education. During the conversation with his brother disciples at Belur Math in 1901, he had cleared the doubt of one of his disciple on the problem of women education. He said,

*In what scriptures do you find statements that women are not competent for knowledge and devotion? In the period of degradation, 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 the places of Rishis through their skill in discussing about Brahman. In an assembly of a thousand Brahmanas who were all erudite in the Vedas, Gargi boldly challenged Yajnavalkya in a discussion about Brahman. Since such ideal women were entitled to spiritual knowledge, why shall not the women have the same privilege now?*

He hoped that if the society provides the light of spiritual knowledge to women, it is sure that they can play an active role in the regeneration of the country. Therefore he said, “if even one amongst the women became the knower of Brahman, then by the radiance of her personality thousands of
women would be inspired and awakened to truth, and great well-being of the country and society would ensure”.

He had also delineated some objectives of the ideal scheme of education which would satisfy the physical, moral and intellectual needs of the people in general and women in particular. The system of education, according to him, should help the female in the formation of their characters. It should also serve as a means for the expansion of the mental and intellectual power. It should also cover health, employment and family welfare along with spiritual development through which women should cultivate spiritual awareness, spiritual freedom, and spiritual courage in their character. Such education, according to him, definitely would meet the needs of women in India and help her solve her day to day problems.

He had also pointed out that proper education can save the women in India by promoting the leadership qualities in them and making them the master and not the slave of her work. It would also impart the spirit of self-confidence and faith in them and encourage them to cultivate spirituality in them. Lecturing on ‘The Education That India Needs’, he said that “Through education comes faith in one’s own Self, and through faith in one’s own Self the inherent Brahman is waking up in them, while Brahman in us is gradually becoming dormant”. Such a spiritual education for women would help them lead a better life so that they can care for their children in
proper ways and play a vital role in imparting education to women. Thus he had given prime importance to education to women in his scheme of national improvement.

He strongly wished to mould a new system of education for women with religion as its core and the first lesson in religious training to the girl students helps to develop qualities like self reliance, self respect, self control, love, dutifulness and consideration for other members of society and realize the divine nature present in the individual self. While talking on the ideal of a Universal Religion, he had asked the people to realize the Ultimate Unity behind this Universe through the medium of spiritual education that helps one attain that ideal. Lecture on ‘The Ideal of a Universal Religion’ he said,

As a man you are separate from the woman; as a human being you are one with the woman. As a man you are separate from the animal, but as living beings, man, woman, animal, and plant are all one; and as existence, you are one with the whole universe. That universal existence is God, the ultimate Unity in the universe.  

Swami wished to open nunneries for women along with girl’s schools where the girl students would get opportunities for learning religious scriptures, literature, Sanskrit, grammar, English and household matters such as
sewing, arts, rules of domestic work and upbringing of their children. While talking with his disciple, once Swami had expressed his views on women’s education. “History and the puranas, housekeeping and the arts, the duties of home-life and the 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”, 31 he said. During the conversation with the brother disciple at Belur Math in 1901 on the problems of women, he hinted at the type of education Indian women needed. “Other matters such as sewing, culinary, art, rules of domestic work, and upbringing of children, will also be taught while Japa, worship, meditation, etc. shall form an indispensable part of the teaching” 32 He believed that “Along with other things they should acquire the spirit of valour and heroism” because “In the present day it has become necessary for them also to learn self-defense” 33 He pointed out the need of giving them knowledge about Indian Ideal of Womanhood through presenting the Ideal characters in the India classics before them. The noble examples of Sita, Savitri, Ahalya, Damayanti, Lilavati, and Mira Bai would certainly inspire them and help them to mould their own future by themselves, he believed.

In short, through his scheme of education, Swami wanted to implement a curriculum which is western materialism and eastern spirituality combined. “What we want are Western science coupled with Vedanta, Brahmacharya
as the guiding motto, and also Sraddha and faith in one’s own self”.

Through imparting spiritual education to the female sex, his intention was to produce strong, faithful self-depend generation of women with spiritual freedom. Therefore he opined, “Women must have freedom to read, to receive as good an education as men. Individual development is impossible with ignorance and slavery”. If they cultivate the quality of self-dependence in them they would be strong enough to face their future and able to solve their day to day problems. They will also be in a position to stand on their own feet after the completion of their education and can serve their family and society. Such a type of education, he believed, would produce the generation of ideal women. “If the life of the women in this country be moulded in such a fashion, then only will there be the reappearance of such ideal characters as Sita, Savitri and Gargi” he said.

Today the concept and purpose of education has changed greatly. The impact of Western means and methods in the present day education system in India has very much affected the social and cultural life of India especially in the life of women. In fact, modern technological developments adversely affected the spiritual outlook of Indian people. It is not able to help students to strengthen their minds and to overcome the trials and tribulations of life. He was very much worried about the impact of modern
education on girls which cannot help them in their spiritual development and thus strengthen their role as the custodians of the spiritual values of the family. Vivekananda had reservations and dissatisfaction about the modern educational system. Swami’s idea of character building education has a great relevance in the modern age because in our present society, the girls were misled by the modern way of life which directs them to imbibe Western culture. We know that there is no helping hand to guide them in proper channel. Swami’s scheme of education would surely promote the reappearance of India’s past ideal of womanhood in the present century.

He was not against the freedom of women to choose their role in life after the completion of education. They can enter into married life and serve the family and inspire their children with noble ideas or stay in the Math, practice yoga and lead a spiritual life as Brahmacharinis. He claimed that whether married or single, women should preserve their chastity because chastity is the prime virtue in the life of men and women of India. He had also stressed the need of imparting the ideal of chastity among women even from her early age through education. It is essential for women to keep their mind and body pure and sacrifice their lives for the sake of their chastity. Only by the preservation of chastity, women can develop purity, strength and faithful character. Thus saus Shri Surendra Nath Sen, one of his disciples about Vivekananda’s view in his private diary:
To make a beginning in women’s education: our Hindu women easily understand what chastity means, because it is their heritage. Now, first of all, intensify that ideal within them above everything else, so that they may develop a strong character by the force of which, in every stage of their life, whether married, or single if they prefer to remain so, they will not be in the least afraid even to give up their lives rather than flinch an inch from their chastity”.

Such a woman can enter the service of society with a fearless mind. They would be honoured and respected by the rest of the world.

He stressed the need of brahmacharinis or nuns too taking part in the nation building programme. “Studying the present needs of the age, it seems imperative to train some women up in the ideal of renunciation, so that they will take up the vow of lifelong virginity, fired with the strength of that virtue of chastity which is innate in their life-blood from hoary antiquity”.

He wished to train such brahmacharinis and help them open centres of female education in the country. This made him plan a women’s monastic Math with the Holy Mother at its helm. Therefore he wrote to Swami Shivananda:

In this terrible winter I am lecturing from place to place and fighting against odds, so that funds may be collected for
Mother’s Math…I shall be relieved when you will have purchased a plot of land and established there the living Durga, the Mother. Till then I am not returning to my native land. ...As soon as you have secured the land for Mother, I go to India straight. It must be a big plot; let there be a mud-house to begin with, in due course I shall erect a decent building, don’t be afraid.  

SOCIAL SERVICE

He encouraged women participation in social work along with men. “We want both men and women. There is no distinction of sex in the soul… We want thousands of men and thousands of women who will spread like wild fire from the Himalayas to Cape Comorin, from the North pole to the South pole- all over the world”, Swami wrote. He wished our women to come to the main stream of the society as they have a great role to play in the regeneration programme. Vivekananda wrote to his brother disciple Alasinga, “A hundred thousand men and women, fired with the zeal of holiness, fortified with eternal faith in the Lord, nerved to lion’s courage by their sympathy for the poor and the fallen and the downtrodden, will go over the length and breadth of the land, preaching the gospel of salvation, the gospel of help, the gospel of social raising up – the gospel of equality” For this they should be equipped with spiritual knowledge which will provide
them energy, confidence and optimistic view towards life, right perspective and attitude towards their fellow beings and above all good will. While talking on Work And Its Secret, he urged:

Ask nothing; want nothing in return. Give what you have to give; it will come back to you- but do not think of that now, it will come back multiplied a thousand folds- but the attention must not be on that. Yet have a power to give: give and there it ends. Learn that the whole life is giving, that nature will force you to give. So, give willingly. Sooner or later you will have to give up.\(^{42}\)

In order to become a sincere social worker, he urged men or women to develop higher qualities in their character. Primarily, social workers have to cultivate unselfishness in their character which acts as a constructive force. They must have intense desire for helping others and serving humanity by helping them get rid of the socio-economic stress on them. They should be pragmatic in their approach to social problems and should concentrate on the growth and progress of the society. Their approach should be goal oriented, not selfish. They should be true karma yogis in their work. “No need of looking behind. No need of looking behind. FORWARD! We want infinite energy, infinite zeal, infinite courage, and infinite patience, and then only will great things be achieved.”\(^{43}\) he wrote. One of his letters to his
disciples and friends in Madras thus reads: “Do you love man? Do you love your country? Then come, let us struggle for higher and better things; look not back, no, not even if you see the dearest and nearest cry. Look not back, but forward!”

Vivekananda was one of the leading monks who raised his powerful voice for the Indian women. He urged the social thinkers to work for providing the modern Indian women with spiritual as well as moral education on a religious basis. He wanted an independent Math for women to be established first. But, circumstances were not conducive for this during his life-time. He had given instructions to the members of the Belur Math for establishing such a Math. Vivekananda’s dream came true with the establishment of Sarada Mandir for women in 1916 as a residential section of the Nivedita School for young widows and girls. Later in 1954, during the birth centenary year of the Holy Mother, Sri Sarada Math came into being as a part of Ramakrishna Math. In 1959, Sarada Math became an independent entity.

To ensure the active participation of women in his mission of regeneration programme, many training centres for women welfare programme were later started by the trained life workers and Brahmacharinis. Women could avail training from these centres and engaged in the social welfare programme conducted by the Mission for the uplift of rural and tribal communities. The Women Welfare programme in which the Mission concentrates includes
educational and health programme, training in cottage industries, Horticulture and animal husbandry etc. The Mission also provides opportunities for the women workers in rural and tribal welfare programme like *Gramodaya*, *NRDP*, *RDP*. Later, many more educational institutions for women and girls were also started under this Mission, where the trained women gave proper guidance and inspirations to the growing children through Vedanta philosophy and yoga and all such institutions which stood under this organization are still functioning effectively at different places throughout the country for the welfare of women.

**REALIZATION OF SPIRITUAL ONENESS**

He was against the male domination which prevailed in Indian society during his time. According to him, both men and women have to play their role in the growth and development of the country. He urged the women to expand their social, moral, religious, intellectual and spiritual capacities and capabilities by breaking the cocoon the society constructed around them. For the same reason, he wished to establish the women’s Math as an independent organization and it became the only monastic organization that is totally independent of male control, Later, airing out his anxiety on the future of Indian women, he wrote:

*The only sign of life is going outward and forward and expansion. Contraction is death. Why should you do good to*
others? Because that is the only condition of life; thereby you expand your little self; you live and grow. All narrowness, all contraction, all selfishness is simply slow suicide, and when a nation commits the fatal mistake of contracting itself and thus cutting off all expansion of life, it must die. Women similarly must go forward or become idiots and soulless tools in the hands of their tyrannical lords. The children are the result of the combination of the tyrant and the idiot, and they are slaves. And this is the whole history of modern India. Oh, who would break this horrible crystallization of death? Lord help us”  

45

The Swami highly valued the patience of Indian women in this role rearers and educators of the next generation. Indian families, Swami believed are mother-rulled rather that wife-rulled. She gains this predominance in the family through patience endurance and love. Giving Hints on Practical Spirituality, he spoke,

Woman is as courageous as man. Each is equally good in his or way. What man can bring up a child with such patience, endurance, and love as woman can? The one has developed the power of doing; the other, the power of suffering. If woman cannot act, neither can man suffer. The whole universe is one of perfect balance.  

46
Woman is the divine spirit manifest, he believed. Even in the life of man it is not possible for a man to attain any spiritual height without the participation of woman, the Swami who was the true follower of Indian tradition. He held aloft the idea of women’s spiritual equality with men. Whether man or women, their spiritual aim is to realize the ‘Spiritual Oneness’ in humanity. Thus he mentioned in a conversation with a disciple, “In the highest reality of the Parabrahman, there is no distinction of sex. We notice this only in the relative plane. And the more the mind becomes introspective, the more that idea of difference vanishes. Ultimately, when the mind is wholly merged in the homogeneous and undifferentiated Brahman, such ideas as this is a man or that is a woman do not remain at all”  

Imitation of Western culture had brought about a steep fall in a blurring of India’s spiritual vision and consequently values during the British rule and after. This has adversely affected Indian women. Ignoring the glorious status Indian women enjoyed in the past, they were getting mad after the materialistic prosperity and fighting for a western model of social and economic freedom and equality with that of male members. This trend among modern women is bound to affect the spiritual heritage of India, leading the future generation to lose their cultural identity. Therefore he urged Indian women to find out their possibilities in a wider context within the vast expanse, India’s national culture offered. “Beginning with a loyal acceptance of the standards of society, women would more and more, as
they advanced in achievement, learn to understand both the commands and the opportunities, which characterized the national life. By fulfilling those demands, and availing themselves to the full of their opportunities, they would grow more Indian than ever before, even while they entered on grandeur of development, of which the past had never dreamed.”

He made it clear that instead of fighting for the equality with men as done in the west, it is essential for the modern women in India to live for the fulfillment of their spiritual aims. In his ideas on Karma yoga, Vivekananda had mentioned that, “Unity in variety is the plan of creation. However men and women may vary individually, there is unity in the background. The different individual characters and classes or men and women are natural variations in creation. Hence, we ought not to judge them by the same standard or put the same ideal before them.”

He regarded society not as an end but only a means to realize the Divinity present in man and the Divinity cannot be labeled as male or female. Sex distinction is present only in the physical world. In a letter to his brother disciple Kidi, on 3rd March 1894, he had mentioned, “We believe that nowhere throughout the Vedas, Darshanas or Puranas, or Tantras, is it ever said that the soul has any sex, creed, or caste.” He also holds that it is the Dharma which binds all members of the society, whether male or female, and directs them to do the best they can do for the manifestation of ‘Oneness’ within the limits of their capacity. This is well established in his utterance, “We should not think that we are men and
women, but only that we are human beings, born to cherish and to help one another.”

He deemed man and woman as the two wings of the nation. Just as both the wings are equally important for the bird in its successful flight, men and women are equally important for the perfectly balanced growth of any nation. “There is no chance for the welfare of the world unless the condition of women is improved. It is not possible for a bird to fly on only one wing”, he wrote. He also regarded the relationship between man and woman as a complimentary one. A man gets strength and support only from his woman partner. History gives us a clear picture about how women supported their male partners in the social services. “No man shall dictate to a woman; nor a woman to a man. Each one is independent. What bondage there may be is only that of love”, he said. He also reminded that any attempt of one sex to dominate the other will naturally arrest the development of nation. They should work together with mutual respect, love and regards for the spiritual regeneration of our nation. Marriage to him was the greatest prayer between man and wife, a sadhana or preparation for the higher life. They should model their lives after Sri Ramakrishna and his chaste and beloved consort, Sarada Devi, the Holy mother. Marriage is a social institution aimed at performing the duties of life, duties to the society at large and woman is that bedrock on which all the sublimities and cultural heights rest. She is the mother of the family, mother of the coming
generation and she mothers all the buds of cultures yet to be born. Definitely it was this belief that made Swami Vivekananda call India the land of all suffering noble women like Sati, Sita and Savitri, the three gems of Indian womanhood.

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