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A Comparative Study of Educational Thought: Vivekananda and John Dewey

Dr. Abhijit Halder

State Aided College Teacher
Department of Education
Plassey College
Plassey, Nadia, W.B
Mob: 8013060389
Email: abhijit@plasseycollege.ac.in

ABSTRACT:

This research article delves into the educational philosophies of Swami Vivekananda and John Dewey, two influential thinkers from different cultural and temporal contexts. It examines their respective ideas on education, highlighting similarities and differences in their approaches, aims, and methods. By comparing Vivekananda's emphasis on holistic development and spiritual education with Dewey's focus on experiential learning and democracy in education, the article aims to provide insights into how their ideas can inform contemporary educational practices.

Key Words: Democracy, Yoga, Spiritual power.

Introduction:

Education plays a pivotal role in shaping individuals and societies, reflecting diverse philosophical perspectives across cultures and time periods. Swami Vivekananda, a prominent Indian philosopher and spiritual leader of the 19th century, and John Dewey, an American pragmatist philosopher of the early 20th century, both contributed significantly to educational theory and practice. Despite differing backgrounds and contexts, both thinkers shared a profound concern for the development of individuals within society through education. This comparative study aims to explore the key themes in their educational philosophies and analyse their relevance in today's educational landscape.

Background of the Study

Swami Vivekananda

Swami Vivekananda, born Narendra Nath Datta on January 12, 1863, in Kolkata, India, emerged as one of the most influential spiritual leaders and thinkers of modern India. He was a key figure in the revival of Hinduism in the late 19th century and played a significant role in introducing Vedanta and Yoga to the Western world.

In 1893, Vivekananda represented India and Hinduism at the Parliament of the World's Religions in Chicago, where his speech began with the famous words, "Sisters and brothers of America," which garnered him immediate attention and acclaim. His address focused on the harmony of religions and the importance of tolerance and acceptance, making him a notable figure in interfaith dialogue and spiritual pluralism.

Vivekananda's teachings combined practical spirituality with social activism. He emphasized the role of education in the upliftment of society and the importance of selfless service (karma yoga) as a path to spiritual growth. His lectures and writings, including works like "Raja Yoga," "Karma Yoga," and "Jnana Yoga," continue to inspire millions around the world seeking spiritual guidance and a deeper understanding of human potential.

John Dewey

John Dewey, born on October 20, 1859, in Burlington, Vermont, was an American philosopher, psychologist, and educational reformer whose ideas profoundly influenced education and social reform in the United States and beyond. Dewey is regarded as one of the foremost proponents of pragmatism, a philosophical approach emphasizing the practical consequences of ideas and actions.

As a social reformer, Dewey was deeply concerned with democracy and believed that education played a crucial role in creating informed and engaged citizens. His seminal work "Democracy and Education" (1916) explored how education could nurture the development of individuals capable of contributing meaningfully to democratic society.

Dewey's influence extended beyond education into philosophy, ethics, and social theory. His pragmatist philosophy posited that truth and knowledge arise from the application of ideas in concrete situations and evolve through experimentation and adaptation. This approach resonated with intellectuals and reformers seeking solutions to the social and political challenges of the early 20th century.

Swami Vivekananda and John Dewey, although from vastly different cultural and philosophical backgrounds, shared a common concern for human development and social progress. Vivekananda's spiritual teachings emphasized the unity of all religions and the transformative power of selfless service, while Dewey's pragmatic philosophy focused on experiential learning and the role of education in fostering democratic citizenship. Both figures continue to inspire generations with their ideas on education, ethics, and the cultivation of human potential in a rapidly changing world.

Objectives of the study

- To compare between thoughts of Vivekananda and John Dewey
- To compare between curriculum, methods of teaching of Vivekananda and Dewey

Methodology:

This study employs a comparative analysis approach to examine the educational philosophies of Swami Vivekananda and John Dewey. Primary sources including Vivekananda's writings and speeches, such as "Practical Vedanta" and "Lectures from Colombo to Almora," and Dewey's seminal works like "Democracy and Education" and "Experience and Education," serve as the basis for this comparative study. Secondary sources including scholarly articles and commentaries are also consulted to provide additional insights and perspectives.

Comparative Analysis: 1. Aims of Education:

- **Vivekananda:** Emphasized the integral development of the individual, combining intellectual, moral, and spiritual growth. Education was seen as a means to awaken the innate divinity within each person and promote service to humanity.
- **Dewey:** Advocated for education as a tool for social progress and democracy. Dewey believed in fostering critical thinking, problem-solving skills, and the development of a democratic ethos through experiential learning.

2. Methods and Approaches:

- **Vivekananda:** Stressed the importance of holistic education that integrates physical, mental, and spiritual dimensions. He promoted the idea of learning through self-discovery and direct experience, drawing from the principles of Vedanta.
- **Dewey:** Introduced the concept of "learning by doing" or experiential learning, where students learn through active engagement with their environment. Dewey emphasized the role of schools in preparing students for active participation in a democratic society.

3. Role of the Teacher:

- **Vivekananda:** Viewed the teacher as a mentor and guide who facilitates the student's spiritual and moral growth. The teacher's role was to inspire and awaken the latent potential within each student.
- **Dewey:** Saw the teacher as a facilitator of learning experiences, guiding students in their exploration of the world. Dewey emphasized the importance of teachers creating environments that encourage inquiry, cooperation, and critical thinking.

4. Relevance to Contemporary Education:

- Both Vivekananda and Dewey's ideas continue to resonate in modern educational practices. Vivekananda's emphasis on holistic development finds echoes in contemporary movements towards holistic education and mindfulness in schools. Dewey's focus on experiential learning and democratic education is reflected in project-based learning approaches and efforts to promote civic engagement among students.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, the comparative study of Swami Vivekananda and John Dewey's educational philosophies reveals both shared ideals and unique perspectives on the purpose and practice of education. While Vivekananda rooted his educational ideas in spiritual and moral growth, Dewey emphasized pragmatic and democratic principles. Their ideas provide valuable insights into addressing the complex educational challenges of our time, encouraging educators to integrate diverse perspectives and approaches for holistic student development and societal progress.

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