



Relevance Of Acharya Shri Vidyasagar Maharaj's Educational Thoughts In Contemporary World

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Abstract

Acharya Shri Vidyasagar Ji Maharaj, one of the mentors of the National Education Policy 2020 of Bharat, was a revered saint of Jainism. He gave his sermons on holistic education and lifestyle, along with Jain scriptures. His educational thoughts are highly remarkable in the contemporary world. His concerns are primarily on the moral and character development of the student. He was also a strong supporter of women's education. He gave much attention to vocational education and developing entrepreneurial skills in students. His view on environmental education is remarkable. This qualitative review article presents an overview of his educational philosophy and its relevance in the contemporary world.

Keywords: Education, Acharya Shri Vidyasagar, Moral education, Vocational education, Character Building

Introduction

Acharya Shri Vidyasagar ji Maharaj, who was born on *Sharad Purnima* in 1946, was a renowned Jain saint of Digamber sect. There are five *parameshthi*, sacred personalities in Jainism- *Arihant*, *Siddh*, *Acharya*, *Upadhyay*, *Sadhu*. *Acharya* is the highest position in the Jain monastic hierarchy.

Acharya Vidyasagar Ji Maharaj was one of the most respected and revered Jain monks of modern era. A spiritual luminary, scholar, social reformer and a mentor of National Education policy '20 of Bharat¹, he has made remarkable contributions to the fields of Jain philosophy, literature, and social upliftment. His profound wisdom and deep commitment to the principles of non-violence, compassion, and self-discipline have earned him widespread admiration across the world. He was a polymath, known for his expertise in a wide range of subjects, including Jain philosophy, Sanskrit, logic, metaphysics, and ethics. He has written numerous books in Sanskrit, Prakrit, and Hindi, covering topics on spiritual practice, the nature of the soul, ethics, and more. His works include commentaries on ancient Jain texts, original compositions, and treatises on moral philosophy.

He has authored several works that have become textbooks in Jainism and have made significant contributions to Indian philosophical thought.

He has promoted peace, harmony, and spiritual progress. His ability to connect ancient Jain wisdom with contemporary issues has made his teachings relevant across different cultures and generations. He remains an influential figure in the field of spirituality, philosophy, and social reform, respected for his depth of knowledge and his integrity.

Concept of Education

Acharya Vidyasagar Ji Maharaj has always emphasized the transformative power of education, seeing it as the key to personal, social, and spiritual progress. His vision of education goes beyond mere academic knowledge; it is holistic, aiming at the overall development of an individual — intellectually, morally, and spiritually. For him, education should not only prepare people for a career or worldly success but should also be a means of cultivating virtue, self-discipline, and compassion.

Key Aspects of Education According to Acharya Vidyasagar Ji Maharaj:

1. Moral Education for Character Building

Acharya Vidyasagar Ji strongly believed that true education is one that cultivates good character and helps build a person's moral and ethical foundation. According to him, knowledge without character is incomplete.

He emphasized the importance of virtues like truthfulness, non-violence (Ahimsa), compassion, humility, and self-restraint. A person educated in this way would not only be knowledgeable but also wise and ethical in their actions.

2. Spiritual Education

For Acharya Vidyasagar Ji, spiritual education is the highest form of learning. He believed that the ultimate goal of human life is to attain liberation (Moksha), and to achieve this, education must help individuals understand their true nature — the soul (Atman). Education, in this context, is not just about acquiring worldly knowledge, but about learning to overcome ignorance, ego, and attachment. Meditation, self-reflection, and the study of sacred texts form an essential part of this spiritual education.

He often emphasized that true education refines the mind, helping individuals control their desires and live with compassion and equanimity. Jain philosophy and self-realization are key elements of his educational vision.

3. Women Empowerment Through Knowledge

Acharya Vidyasagar Ji placed a strong emphasis on empowering individuals through education, especially women. Although in ancient Jain scriptures like *Aadipurān*, *Padmapurān*, *Siripāl Chariu* and *Shrenik Charitra* etc., women's education has a prominent place. Taking this forward, Acharya Vidyasagar Ji advocated for women's education. He believed that both men and women should have equal opportunities for education, as true progress in society can only be achieved when both genders are educated and empowered.

He advocated for the establishment of schools and educational institutions that could uplift marginalized sections of society, particularly women and the underprivileged. His vision was to create a society where education is not only a right but a responsibility to help others grow.

4. Practical Education

While academic education is important, Acharya Vidyasagar Ji believed that the practical application of learning is equally important. He stressed that education should teach individuals how to live with integrity, make ethical decisions, and contribute to the welfare of society. He emphasized the development of critical thinking, problem-solving, and service to others.

For him, education should not be confined to schools or universities; it should be a lifelong journey. He often said that life itself is the greatest teacher, and one must continue to learn and grow spiritually, intellectually, and morally throughout their lives.

5. Social Reforms Through Education

Acharya Vidyasagar Ji saw education as a powerful tool for social reform. He understood that for any true change to occur in society, people must be educated about their duties, rights, and responsibilities.

He inspired many of his followers to use their knowledge to bring about positive social change. He gave inspiration to open *Hathkargha Kendra* at various places including tribal areas where the training of manufacturing hand made cloths is given. This is one of his efforts for upliftment of the underprivileged section of the society by making them self employed. He emphasized that education should lead to the well-being of the whole community and should focus on uplifting the downtrodden and addressing the needs of the poor.

6. Value of Traditional and Modern Knowledge

Acharya Vidyasagar Ji revered the ancient texts of Jainism and other Indian traditions, but he also valued modern knowledge and scientific inquiry. His education system was not about rejecting modernity, but about harmonizing traditional wisdom with contemporary learning. He often spoke about the importance of respecting both ancient scriptures and modern sciences in the pursuit of truth.

He encouraged his followers to study both ancient Jain texts like the Agamas, and to be open to modern science, technology, and social studies to understand the world more comprehensively.

7. Self-Education and Continuous Learning

A key aspect of Acharya Vidyasagar Ji's vision of education is the concept of self-education. He believed that an individual must take responsibility for their own learning and growth. He often spoke about the importance of self-study and self-discipline, encouraging people to learn from their mistakes, meditate on their actions, and continually strive for spiritual and intellectual progress.

8. Religious Education

For Acharya Vidyasagar Ji, education was not limited to intellectual development but also to religious growth. He emphasized learning about Jain rituals, ethics, and scriptures. He encouraged young Jains to study Jain philosophy and practice the principles of Ahimsa (non-violence), Satya (truth), and Aparigraha (non-possessiveness) in their lives.

Acharya Vidyasagar Ji Maharaj's approach to education is holistic and deeply rooted in both moral principles and spiritual wisdom. His educational philosophy transcends the boundaries of formal schooling and emphasizes the development of character, ethical values, social responsibility, and spiritual enlightenment. Education, in his view, is the means to transform the individual and, by extension, society. It should foster not only intellectual growth but also compassion, service, and spiritual awakening, guiding individuals toward a life of purpose, integrity, and non-violence.

Curriculum

Acharya Vidyasagar ji Maharaj emphasized on A Holistic, Transformative Curriculum which should include Moral and Ethical Education, Spiritual Education, Classical Studies, Logic and Philosophy along with Modern Sciences and Social Studies.⁴

He suggested that the practical knowledge of language, arts, literature, history, maths, geography, science etc. should be included in the curriculum that is useful for life. He also suggested that the option to choose a specific stream of education should be after intermediate education at the age of eighteen which is the age to elect his representative in the nation's assembly.

Medium of Education

Acharya advocated that the medium of education should be the mother language, one can not get true education in foreign language. He suggested that the student can easily grasp, express and reflect the knowledge, if imparted in the mother language. If the nation wants to discover exceptional abilities, the medium of education should be the mother language.

Methods of Teaching

He suggested that the methods of teaching should be according to the objectives of education. He suggested Practical work, problem solving method, self learning method, learning through self experiences, observation, enquiry and experimental method for the deeper cultivation of knowledge which will develop the cognitive, affective and psychomotor learning of the student.

School

He called the school as "*upashram*", where emphasis is laid on the all-round development of the individual, which is the center of upliftment of the culture. According to him The school should be conducted in a quiet, picturesque and natural place, away from the materialistic environment. He was in favour of the ancient Bhartiya education system. He said that the school is a place where cultured teachers illuminate the undiscovered abilities of students. He understood that woman education is compulsory for the society, so he inspired to start many residential schools for girl children named "*Pratibhasthali Gyanodaya Vidyapeeth Kanya Avasiya Vidyalaya*" where the ancient Bhartiya gurukul rules are followed and there is positive relation among teachers and students.

Teacher

He said that a teacher is a cornerstone for nation building. He should impart knowledge selflessly. A teacher should be characterful, unbiased, and spiritual. A teacher should also be a continuous learner so that he can impart knowledge of the dynamic world.

Student

His view regarding the student was that a student should be a plant of ground and not of the pot so that the roots of his culture can deepen and when the time comes, he can bear the fruits of virtues. Student should have qualities like politeness, self study, self awareness, concentration etc.

Teacher-Student Relationship

Acharya Vidyasagar ji Maharaj suggested that the teacher should behave with the child with love, affection, sympathy and consideration. Teacher should engage students in useful and constructive activities and motivate them to learn by their experiences. This will develop the moral and ethical values in students resulting in all round development.

Discipline

Acharya Vidyasagar ji Maharaj suggested practicing self directed discipline where the student is self aware about his deeds. He regarded discipline as a self-governance system in which both the teacher and the student are given guidance to remain disciplined. Discipline is not just following the rules, but obedience to orders, discipline in action and self-restraint.

Women Education

Acharya Shri was a strong supporter of women's education. He said that if a woman is educated she can form an educated family and society by nurturing good values in her children. Although in Jainism, women's education has been given more importance than male education, taking this forward, Acharya Shri got "Pratibha Sthali Vidyapeeth" schools established at various places where girls are educated accordingly.

Environmental Education

The subtlety with which Acharya ji has explained the environment is very deep and profound. According to his thoughts, the coordinated behaviour of living beings and the world is called environment and their integrated behaviour is called environment conservation. He said that the cause behind the environment pollution is cultural pollution which is impacting the Bhartiya culture negatively by its consumerist and

exploitative tendency of living by reckless utilisation of resources. Acharya ji's ideology is spiritual, which gives the great mantra of living a contented life by adopting non violence and limited possessions.

Vocational Education

Acharya ji gave much emphasis on vocational education that makes students capable to be an entrepreneur rather than seeking a job. He wanted that every student should get the knowledge to be self-reliant, he should be educated in a way that he can earn good money for himself. He gave inspiration to start *Hathkargha Kendras*, where students get training to make good quality hand made clothes.

Conclusion

Acharya Vidyasagar ji Maharaj was a great philosopher of this era. He left his mortal body on 18th February 2024, but his moral and spiritual teachings still enlighten the path of his followers. His philosophy regarding education is highly acceptable for teachers, students and all the stakeholders. He had firm faith and belief in the Bhartiya education system that the Bhartiya education system can provide cultured, well-educated and responsible citizens. He himself was very disciplined in his Digambar Acharya routine and determined to do anything that he had decided. So is reflected in his suggestions for the stakeholders in education. The concept of moral education and character development is a crucial requirement in education along with experiential education. His suggestion to choose the specific stream after the age of eighteen is relevant as this is the age when adolescents begin to think more critically about their values, beliefs, and goals, also this is the age to choose the right representative in the most democratic countries.

His views on women's education, vocational education, practical, science and environment education are very relevant in the contemporary world and pave the path to attain all the seventeen sustainable development goals.

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