

FOUNDATIONS FOR AN EDUCATIONAL CAREER

by

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Education is the process of the gradual and systematic summoning of the tendency in the human being to the realisation of perfection. As the concept of perfection is unclear in the initial stages, the approach to the mind of the public, in this direction, has to be initiated with immense patience and care. When we deal with persons, we are really concerned with minds, and hence all successful approach in life is psychological.

We have, first of all, to place ourselves in a position where we can appreciate sympathetic thoughts and feelings of people. For this purpose, we may classify society into three categories: (1) the student, who includes the child and the adolescent; (2) the man of the world or the active in society, including the youth and the middle-aged man; (3) the retired person, including all those who do not lead an active life but are in the evening of their age. Social regeneration has to keep in view all these stages of life and provide for their respective inner demands.

For the present we may confine ourselves to the minds of the budding generation, viz. the student population, for we have to begin the work of reformation and the regeneration of society at the stage of the student, when the mind is flexible and amenable to the educational process. Here we have to start from the standpoint of the taught and not

merely of the teacher. Education is not a process of merely emptying out the mind of the teacher by pouring its knowledge into the minds of students, but a feeling of their needs and supplying them with the proper thing, at the proper time, in the proper manner. A teacher, thus, has to be a good psychologist and should not regard teaching as a kind of business with the students. The teacher should have the capacity to make himself liked by the minds which need teaching. This pleasant process of the imparting of knowledge is education.

In these days, neither the students nor the teachers are happy with the educational process, because it has been forgotten by the authorities concerned that education has to be physical, intellectual, emotional, moral, active and spiritual, all at once, in a way beautifully fitted to the conditions in which one is placed. The technique of education should take into consideration the average of the intelligence-quotient, health, social conditions, etc. of the students. It should also concentrate itself on methods for bringing about and effecting (1) the development of personality, (2) an adequate knowledge of the world, (3) an adjustment of self with society, and (4) a realisation of the permanent values of life.

By development of personality what is meant is the wholesome building up of the individual, not only with reference to the internal states of body, mind and intellect, but also in relation to the external world reaching up to the individual through the different levels of society. In this sense, true education is both a diving inward and a spreading outward. Knowledge of the world is not merely a collection of facts or gathering information regarding the contents of the physical world but forms a kind of insight into its inner workings as well, at least in so far as one's inner and outer life is inextricably wound up with them. With this knowledge it becomes easy for one to discover the art of adjusting oneself with society. This adjustment is not possible in any appreciable degree for one who has not acquired some amount of knowledge of the spiritual implications of the

structure of human society. The aim of the education of the individual in society is the realisation of life's values—personal, social, civic and even universal; all mutually related and determined by a common goal to which these are directed.

Above all, we cannot start teaching students without our understanding the purpose of education. Many a Hindu, for example, has allowed himself or herself to be proselytised for different reasons. One such reason consists in the prospects of economic upliftment and raising of social status which the converters promise to these poor souls who have been unfortunately relegated to the unwanted section of Hindu society, by somehow depriving them of the facilities to improve themselves economically. The second reason is the baneful practice of untouchability and pollution by touch, which certain orthodox groups cultivated for a long time and which has not completely died out even today. Now the question arises: Why should have these things happened? Why should there be suppression and untouchability etc. in human circles? The answer is: lack of proper education.

But what is proper education? Bearing in mind the essentials of the process enumerated above, it should be added that though education should be an immensely practicable affair, we should not think that the practicability of a thing consists in what is called 'succeeding' in life in any political sense of the term, because one may manoeuvre to succeed for some time, as one does in business, for instance, but be extremely unhappy within, in spite of the so-called 'practical' success. This happens because here we have only a soulless practicality of affairs, bereft of the sap of life which sustains it. Though, when we occupy a house, we are not always conscious of its foundation, nor is the foundation visible to the eyes, it goes without saying that the whole edifice stands on the foundation. Likewise, human success in life may look beautiful like a decorated and furnished building, but it cannot stand if it is not firmly fixed on a strong base. Our purpose here would be to have some idea as to what could this foundation of life's education be.

Education is for living life and not to suffer it. It is a wrong concept of the basis of life that has led to the defective structure of the present educational system. It is not necessary that religion in the orthodox sense or Dharma as the conservatives understand it should be proclaimed in the schools. The right type of education should have a very broad outlook and exceed the limits of parochial religions or the cult of any class of society and should be free from the prejudices of caste, creed and colour. The present-day system of education is thoroughly unsatisfactory, for, while it rejects all religion in the name of secularism, it rejects also the essentials of human aspiration and makes education a dead mechanism which has to be operated by a living being from outside. Education is not a machine to be driven by an external impulse but constitutes a vital process which has life in it and grows of its own accord when soul is poured into it. The bread-earning education has to become a life-earning education, for the latter, in addition to supplying bread, shall also supply man with a soul to live by.

The erroneous construction of the educational basis is, then, grounded on a mistaken concept of life's values. The world we live in is believed to be a solid mass of matter. Even our own bodies are seen to be parts of the physical Nature governed by mechanistic laws, which alone appears to be all that is real. It has become a commonplace today, especially in the universe of science, that life is strictly determined by the law of causality which rules over the entire scheme of the world. We are told that distinctions that are supposed to obtain between such realms of being as matter, life and mind are superficial and are accounted for by the grades of subtlety in the manifestation and spreading of particles of matter. Even the organism of the human body which appears to defy the laws of the machine of the universe as envisaged by science is explained away as only one of the many forms of the workings of the forces of matter which is the ultimate stuff of all things. It is said that even mind is only a subtle, ethereal exudation of forces of matter. The human being is reduced to a speck in the gigantic structure of the cosmos.

Behaviourist psychology with its materialistic implications gives a finishing touch to this doctrine of the mechanistic view of life.

The fact that man is not merely a humble cog in the deterministic machine of a relentless world and that the essence of man is a spiritual principle, co-extensive with the Universal Spirit, was easily discovered in the course of human evolution. Those in India, educated under the scheme of Macaulay, however, continued to move along the ruts of a so-called modernism of thinking, a rationality of approach and a scientific attitude of life, so much spoken of in these days. People began gradually to shed their spiritual legacy and started to strut proudly under the unseen yoke of a culture wedded to a secret achievement of suzerainty over them. It is this fatal tendency of thought that has to be counteracted by right means of education today.

A correct appreciation of human values is essential before introducing any suitable method of education. It is impossible to solve the problem of the educational method so long as the authorities feel satisfied that the body of man is the final word about him. The mistake seems to be not so much with the students as with those concerned with the act of teaching, for the students, under the current which flows before them, move with it from an early age. We have to observe with regret that one of the reasons why, for example, some Hindus are willing to change their religion is because they are dissatisfied with the promises of their own religion and the way in which their religion treats them. Apart from the pernicious practice of physical segregation in the form of untouchability and the intellectual assumption of superiority on the part of a few of the classes of society, a sort of false and inadequate values in religion have been responsible to a great extent in causing a schism between man and man in the country. There is the natural instinct to visualise the better in an unknown promise of the future and, like the calf which moves from one place to another in search of the distant greens which it sees with unclear eyes, one is tempted to undergo a conversion of faith. Essentially, what is needed in

religion is its understanding by its followers. Often the cry 'save us from our friends', seems to have a meaning. The foolish friend is worse than a knowledgeable enemy. The Pundits of the Hindu religion and the scholars who do research in its fields have been both moving in blind alleys; the one clinging to rigid tradition and blind faith and the other to an arid rationality, though untenable. It is not true that we have nothing to learn from the West, as some conservative Hindus may hold, for we have to respect the change of times and the need for a revaluation of values. Indian culture has survived due to its flexibility, when other ancient cultures have died out due to their rigidity. It is also not true that Indian religion is mere superstition, myth and fable, as some modern scientific thinkers in oriental learning seem to think. The good is to be taken from wherever it is found, for knowledge is the aim of education, and not dogmatic clinging to unsound conservatism.

It is necessary to write a small text-book on the constitution of man in the Universe in such a simple way that it could be understood even by children of a primary school. It may begin with simple questions and answers, stories and even small plays which can be enacted on the stage. The book should contain information on the structure of the human personality in relation to outer Creation in a readable and intelligible manner. It should also deal with the fundamentals of human conduct on the basis of this relation of man to Creation. Not only this; some knowledge should be provided of the aim of such conduct on the part of human beings. These things should be said without saying things like philosophy, ethics, teleology and such phrases which are the jargons of the schools of thought. No stereotyped phrases or technical terms should ever be used in such a book. In fact, these should be avoided, because now one is concerned with the primary standard of education where technicality of any kind is to be carefully set aside. The lessons may abound in apt stories and simple plays intelligible to beginners. This may form the background of a preliminary booklet on the fundamentals of life.

There should be three or four text-books in a graded series of this nature, suitable to the primary, elementary, high school and college standard of education. The books should be written in such a way that students should be able to take interest in the subjects and cherish a faith that they are going to be benefited by the study. The high school and college levels should gradually introduce advanced learning.

In the text-books for higher classes, which will outgrow the elementary teachings, stories, etc. of the early stages, the student may be introduced to the great heritage of India in the form of its deep culture. The spiritual-cum-temporal import of the hymns of the Vedas, such as the Purusha-Sukta, the Mandukya Upanishad, the conversation between Yajnavalkya and Maitreyi in the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad, the suggestiveness of the Creation theories of revelations like the Aitereya Upanishad, the epics of the Ramayana and the Mahabharata and the basic gospel of the Bhagavad Gita should find a proper place in the higher stages of education. An acquaintance of the student with the immortal heroes of India, like Rama and Krishna; sages like Nara-Narayana, Vasishtha, Vyasa, Suka, Dattatreya, Jadabharata, Vamadeva, Uddalaka, Yajnavalkya, Parasara, etc.; India's great rulers like Prithu, Marutta, Ambarisha, Mandhata, Sibi, Harischandra, Dilipa, Bhagiratha, Raghu, Aja, Dasaratha, Janaka, Rama, Yayati, Bharata, Yudhishtira, Vikramaditya, Asoka and the like, is essential at a particular stage. Short life-sketches of teachers like Sankara, Ramanuja and Madhva, and saints like Gauranga, Nanak, Tukaram, Jnanesvar, Mirabai, Surdas, Tulasidas, Kabirdas, Purandaradas, etc., should be provided in suitable places. The contributions to India's cultural revival by Swami Vivekananda, Swami Ramatirtha, Swami Dayananda, Swami Sivananda, Annie Besant, Rabindranath Tagore, Aurobindo and S. Radhakrishnan should be brought home to the minds of students, particularly in the college level. To give a broader vision of culture in general and to point out the unity underlying human aspirations, a separate section may be devoted to the lives and teachings of Buddha,

Mahavira, Christ, Mohammed, the Sufi saints and the Sikh Gurus.

Teachers should, at the background of their minds, keep behind education the fourfold aim of human existence; Righteousness in all its stages and forms (Dharma), economic independence (Artha), emotional satisfaction (Kama) and spiritual realisation (Moksha), as the principal incentive to all human activity. This viewpoint should be constantly maintained at the teaching level, so that the purpose of education may not be missed on the way to the achievement of tangible results. It is also necessary to remember that without some standard of self control (Yama-Niyama); which has to be properly defined at any given situation, the curriculum of studies is not going to be flawless. This is a rule to be observed both by the teacher and the taught. The educational career is a holy pursuit. Its sacredness should never be profaned by indulgences of the subhuman urges. The intellectual, volitional, emotional and active sides of human nature should all receive adequate attention. No one side should be stressed at the expense of the others. Else, there is likely to be a revolt of the neglected aspects at some later stage. The relation between the inner and the outer realities, the psychic nature of man and the physical and social nature of the world, should be harmoniously maintained at every stage of teaching. Let not the teacher think that the student is an instrument that can be operated merely by external pressure. This would be a gross blunder. For the student is a living being, a human individual, with outer desires and inner aspirations not yet properly articulated. Ignorance of this fact has led to the grievous condition of the present-day educational institutions. The individual (Vyashti) and the universal (Samashti) are organically related and not mechanically dovetailed.

The mechanistic view of education held by Western educationists and imitated almost everywhere nowadays forgets the lifeelement present in the bodily structure of man and his environment. Education has concern with life, mind and intellect and the theory that these are exudations from

the bodily mechanism is the erroneous knowledge imported from Western psychologists. The individual, family, community, nation and the world at large are quantitative extensions of the set-up of the individual's bodily existence, but it is to be remembered that these outer forms have their inner being hidden from the physical eye but asserting themselves perennially as a universal spirit which speaks out in various languages of mind and intellect the same message of the integral value of the entire existence. The law of action and reaction, called Karma, the laws of physics, chemistry, biology, psychology and sociology of the moral urge and of political history, are all different affirmations of this eternal truth. Holding this in view, the ancient teachers in India instituted the order of the four classes of society (Varnas), to harness wisdom, power, material and labour into a single force of progressive human society. This institution had also the advantage of preventing class rivalry and competition, and substituting it with cooperation and mutual respect of values. The institution of the stages (Ashramas) of life revealed the ultimate purpose of all existence pressing itself forward in every stage of life, of the student, the man of the world, the mature philosopher and the one who has attained insight into universal life. The last stage is the culmination of human endeavour and its needs have to be reflected in everyone of the preceding steps. This is India's grand vision of perfection.

The Western yoke on India has left an impact which always insists that whatever modern science says alone is right. Unfortunately, this is not true, for the field of science is sensory, on which are founded experiment and logic, and today the boasts of science are slowly getting exploded as false and vainglorious. One is told that man comes from the ape, that one's ancestors were untutored tribes, that the past history of one's land is the story of animal-men roaming wildly in jungles, that life began with fungi which grew on earth millions of years ago, and that hunger and sex exhaust the psychic urges of humanity. Contrast with this the sublime wisdom of the masters who proclaimed that the world was

originally involved in the universal being of God, that life, mind and reason are evolutes which spring back to God in a gradual self-realisation, that history also records the lives of mighty sovereigns and great sages whose personalities manifested the cosmic order of justice, truth and knowledge, that our life is a faint pointer to the latent potentialities for a vaster life in eternity and infinity and that our aspirations are indicators of what we are in ourselves essentially. There is no reason why spiritual intuitions should be mere fancies and only scientific findings be correct. We are already in an age where the very foundations on which science is based are being doubted and are regarded as questionable hypotheses. Sense, reason and intuition are three stages of knowledge, the succeeding one being more inclusive and nearer to reality than the preceding.

Care has, however, to be taken in ensuring that in our enthusiasm, the relative merits of the Eastern and Western cultures are not missed but duly recognised. Neither should a total abrogation of the foreign nor a lowering of the dignity of the indigenous culture be resorted to even by mistake. Cultures stand or fall in accordance with their ability to meet the needs of human nature in the changes of time. Physical education and instruction in the sciences is a necessity, especially in this century, and this knowledge should be imparted in the regular modern manner of educational discipline in the institution, coupled with a touch of the personal element in teaching. This latter aspect is more important in the educational process than the way in which it is likely to be appreciated by many.

Teaching is a more difficult task than learning, for the student has mostly to imitate the teacher and do what he says, while the teacher has to take the original initiative and the trouble of understanding the mind of the student. But we should not imagine that the role of the student is one of mere submission, for the faculty of judgment is present in everyone, though it is incipient in the student. Teaching is a process in psychology and calls forth not only superhuman

patience but also infinite understanding on the part of the teacher.

Apart from the curriculum of teaching in the arts and sciences, there should be provision for recreation, excursion, pleasant exercise and open-air living. Contact with Nature is as important as lessons in the classroom. A student should not, if possible, be allowed to mingle with persons who are likely to disturb the educational career. A screening away of the student from communal or political movements is essential. Hostel arrangements in the schools would help much in isolating students from undesirable contacts. A distinction may be drawn, if necessary, between residential scholars and day scholars, as it is done even now in certain Christian colleges. Residential education would come near the system of Gurukulavasa, where students are not allowed to contact even their parents and relatives during the period of education. All these things may be a little difficult where poverty is rampant and facilities for living are scanty, particularly in our country. It is here that the well-to-do should come forward and help the implementation of true education. The premises and the atmosphere of the school should be clean and attractive so that the mind receives a subtle impact of an elevated mood while one is in it. The dignity of the behaviour of the teachers, the restriction of their conduct purely to educational work, and their unselfishness of motive, add much to the perfection of the course of education. As far as possible, the school should be away from cities and not in the thick of the crowd, which may have an undesirable effect on the minds of students. They must have pure air to breathe, both physically and psychologically.

It is difficult to control the emotions of the younger generation. Regimen and discipline should be mollified by adequate entertainment. Educational and cultural film shows may form a part of occasional programmes. Music and dance of an elevated nature, as also familiarity with the arts of sculpture and painting exert a good influence on the emotion and give it a mild satisfaction. It is to be seen that the

emotions are not allowed to grow wild either by too much restriction or by too much enjoyment. Emotions have to be channelised towards the culture of the spirit which seeks its manifestation in the form of life in the world. A satisfactory training in noble living cannot be given in a few years alone. The basement has to be laid at the first standard of education and the work of construction should continue at least up to the Higher Secondary School level, which would ensure training for about twelve years, the minimum period fixed in the tradition of Gurukulavasa. Charging of high fees from students may deter large sections of people from availing themselves of such benefit. Poverty is a great hindrance to progress everywhere. The richer classes should come forward and help the working of this system, for the country is not going to be freed from mental slavery and ignorance of culture by educating merely the sons and daughters of a few aristocrats in its different corners. To enable this method of education reach at least the majority, funds are obviously necessary, for the teachers have to be paid well to prevent them from falling into indifference and corruption. More important still is to find proper teachers. Much spadework has to be done in the beginning, and adequate funds invested for the purpose. It is a question of the blending of the intellectual, economic, moral and spiritual powers. All these have to be combined into a single force, as it was done in ancient India by a loving co-operation between the sages and rulers.

Summing up, certain features may be reiterated, which go to make for success in the educational process. Firstly, the building of the school or the college should be architecturally attractive and stately, catching one's spirits and elevating them spontaneously. Unclean, slovenly and ill-maintained sheds have a depressing effect on the mind, even without one's knowing it consciously. Secondly, the premises of the institution should be perfectly clean and one should be able to breathe an air of health when one steps into it. Thirdly, the institution should be away from the atmosphere of the city and be in natural surroundings, untouched by the busy,

community life and also the communal and political atmosphere of urban areas. Fourthly, the authorities should manage to enshrine an atmosphere of seriousness, solemnity and sublimity in the premises of the institution. Fifthly, there should be a neatness of conduct between teachers or professors and students and a mutual sense of affection and trust between them has to be established, so that the whole institution becomes a fraternity dedicated to a common purpose. Sixthly, there should be a comprehensive and methodical layout of the curriculum of studies in different classes. Seventhly, suitable text-books have to be prepared embodying the subjects of the curriculum. Eighthly, as obedience to the principal of the institution is compulsory in every case, it should be seen that he sets a practical example to others by his ideal personal demeanour, impartiality of treatment and devotion to the ideal of the institution. Ninthly it should be a rule that trainees cannot go out of the premises of the institution during the 'spread-out' of the school or college hours, without permission of the concerned authority. Tenthly, attempt should be made to run as many residential schools as possible, so that the ancient system of Gurukulavasa may once again be revived, and students are not allowed to contact outsiders during the whole period of their educational career. Finally, the authorities of the institution should succeed in infusing confidence in the students as to the genuineness of the interest which they have in the welfare of the latter.

All this work is a difficult aim, but it can be achieved with effort.