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ATULARTHAM

Bridging the Past

Essays in Honour of Professor Atul Kumar Sinha



Edited by

Renu Shukla • Anup Mishra

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Ancient Indian Education and Students Well-Being

Pradeep Shyam Ranjan

Introduction

Modern time may be characterized as economic globalization, and its heightened emphasis on consumerism and high degree of competition. The materialistic value system and individualistic orientation of people is concerned with possession, look and prestige. Quality of performance has become the key factor for personal progress. Parents desire that their children climb the ladder of performance to as high a level as possible. They are measuring their social status and future economic security in the terms of child's school performance. This has made the parents overly anxious about the child's school success. As a consequence they are pressing their children to achieve performance targets that may have even been impossible for them. They are trying to stretch the child's effort even to the level where the child may be turned out to be money minting machine without any regard for human or spiritual values or may be mentally broke. The parents are looking for educational psychologist, counselors and astrologers or even to tablets, syrups or pills that may increase their efficiency. Many of them will not be concerned even with appropriateness of means for improving the school achievement of their children.

The main focus and concern of today's education is basically related to cognitive development with an individualistic approach. Materialistic value system, individualism, and globalization have transformed the aim and direction of education. Teachers have become information-provider and educational institutes are the center of degree provider. According to Dr. Radha Krishnan the causes of sorrowfulness of the entire world including India that education is being related only development of brain not the acquisition of ethical and spiritual values.

The Influence of Education on Human Well-being

Well-being has been conceptualized in different ways, but most definitions emphasise positive psychological states as opposed to the absence of negative cognitions and feelings. In their definition of health, the World Health Organization (WHO, 1997) recognises that mental well-being plays an all-important role in health measurements as they state that health incorporates "a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being not merely the absence of disease." Well-being is an ongoing, dynamic, and fluid process. It is more than feeling good. Well-being is about more than living 'the good life'; it is about having meaning in life, about fulfilling our potential and feeling that our lives are worthwhile. The high level well-being includes promoting the well-being of others as well as of the self.

Education has an enormous impact on human well-being. Education is the primary source to enable an individual for being self-sufficient. Educational attainment is positively associated both with health status and with healthy lifestyles.

Ancient Indian Education

Indian view of education reflects in the Sanskrit expression 'sa vidya ya vimuktaye' (knowledge is that which liberates). In India, school was known as temple of Saraswati (the goddess of knowledge) where students acquire knowledge in the guidance of gurus (teachers). Teaching was considered as a responsible and noble work in India and teachers were placed by the society in a very high esteem. The position of teachers is reflected in vedic lines, "gurur brahama, gurur Vishnu, gurur devo maheshwara, Gurur sakshat paratama tasanye shri gururtye namah." One another famous line by Kabeer Das, "gurur govind dono khade, ke laghu jano, balihari guru apna, govind diyo batay" shows the importance of teachers in India.

A teacher was not just an information provider and teaching was not a profession but a social responsibility/duty. Learning was accepted as a source of holistic development and related to spirituality and idealism. "Learning in India through the age had been prized and pursued not for its own sake, if we may so put it, but for the sakes, and as a part of religion. It was sought as the means of solution or self-realization, as the means to the highest end of life, viz., mukti or emancipation" (Mukherjee 1989). From the Vedic age downwards the central conception of education of the Indians has been that it is a source of illumination, giving us a correct lead in the various spheres of life" (Altekar, 1943: 8.)

According to Dr. Rajendra Prasad, the great philosopher and first Indian President, "Education is the establishment of a two fold harmony, one individual harmony with his own self and harmony with other living beings in the whole world." The aim of education was not related to only individualistic well-being but the well-being of *pranamatra*, and *vashudhaava-kutumbkam* (The world is one family).

The nature of ancient Indian education was very broad and not bounded in narrow means like getting higher grades in class, getting admission in reputed college or getting a good job, but related to religious and spiritual development. In short the aim was three dimensional:

- Acquisition of knowledge.
- Acquisition of socio-religious responsibility.
- Character-formation.

→ Direct aim of ancient Indian education was to make the student fit to become a useful and pious member of society (Rangachar, 1964). Inculcating the civic and social duties among the students was also a part of ancient Indian educational system. The students were not to lead a self-centered life. They were constantly reminded of their obligations to the society. Convocation address to the students around in Upanishads show how they were inspired to be useful members of the society (Mookerjee 1989).

The most important idea governing the ancient system of education was that of perfection for developing the mind and soul of man. Ancient Indian educational system focussed on building a disciplined and values-based culture. Human values such as trust, respect, honesty, dignity, and courtesy are the building blocks of any free, advanced society (Markandan, 2005). Ancient education system aimed at character formation through proper development of moral feelings to make the students really learned and care in their life, thoughts and habits (Ghosh, 2005).

Concluding Remarks

→ Indian education has had a broad aim. It was related to multi-dimensional development of a student

It was value-based and concern with spiritual development as well as cognitive development. Now, days we face many social-psychological problems in schools. Students show anti-social, abnormal and unethical behaviour in classroom as well as at home also. Teachers are finding it very difficult to deal with such students. Now, we are facing the results of an educational system established by British administrators. We are blindly following an educational system that is not based on Indian philosophy of education. Education is no more related to values and social responsibility.

To avoid these problems, education must address the issue of character formation along with developing the full potential of human beings. Education must place a secure foundation for trust, cooperation, teamwork, humanity and similar vital lubricants of societal life.

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