

# Education Today A Holistic Approach

**THE PRESENT EDUCATION SYSTEM PREVAILING IN THE COUNTRY AND MOST OF THE WORLD HAS FAILED TO SOLVE MAJOR GLOBAL PROBLEMS LIKE ENVIRONMENTAL DEGRADATION CAUSED DUE TO EXCESSIVE GREED.**

*'Prakrst rupena gati iti pragati.'*

Progress means moving towards perfection, and perfection is the embodiment of the Supreme Consciousness Himself. True education is that which leads us to perfection. Here I'm reminded of our assembly prayer at the Rashtriya Indian Military College, Dehra Dun, (RIMC) in the nineteen fifties recited most mornings by our principal late Shri Din Dayal, who by his sterling service of over half a century to the cause of education in the country became one of its leading lights.

*Where the mind is without fear,  
where the head is held high,  
Where knowledge is free.  
Where the world has not been broken,  
into narrow domestic walls.  
Where the clear stream of reason,  
has not lost its way,  
In the dreary desert sand of dead habit.  
Where the tireless striving  
stretches its hands towards perfection  
Into that heaven of freedom,  
my Father let my country awake.*

Just what Gurudev Rabindra Nath Tagore was trying to convey by the above words penned many years ago when our country was shackled in the long dark night of slavery, awaiting deliverance of the golden dawn of a new dawn of freedom and light. Was it political freedom for the elite or was it economic freedom for the starving toiling masses or was it freedom pure and simple. One that enlightens, one that liberates, that which develops string legs on the eternal march forward and lets the mind soar towards

perfection. *'Sa vidya vimuktaye,'* knowledge (education) is that which liberates and true knowledge is knowing oneself. And how does one go about acquiring this seemingly elusive touchstone? With tools of learning of course; before birth, in the mother's womb, from the first cry of life to the last silence of death, we are learning. And who helps us learn. It is the teacher.

## Our Teachers

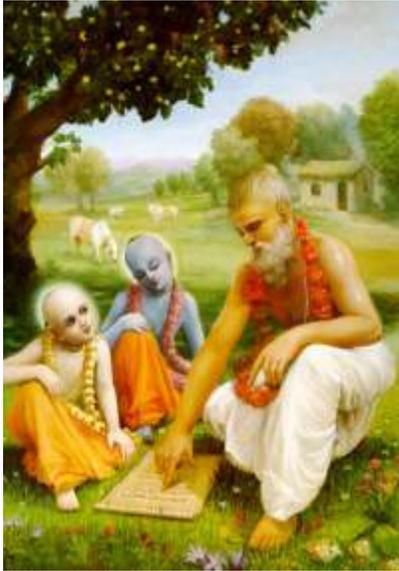
The teacher is Mother Nature with thousands and thousands of years of programmed learning implanted in our genes upon the road map of evolution. Teachers are parents, the home environment in the most formative first five years of our lives. Then come teachers in schools, colleges, universities, and finally the greatest teacher the journey of life itself.

What is of primary concern to us now are the teachers in schools, the fountainhead of learning, the building blocks of four pillars of education as decreed in the Report of the International Commission on Education for the twenty-first century namely, “learning to know, learning to do, learning to be and learning all the time.” What should also be of equal concern to us in our country is where does all this lead us to and where? Before we attempt to consider this question, perhaps it is worthwhile to briefly trace the history of education in India.

## HISTORY

### Vedic and post Vedic Period

During the Vedic period education was regarded as a source of harmonious development of the physical, mental and spiritual faculties of the people. The Vedic system enriched India by its knowledge of



the multi faceted aspects of life a knowledge that astonishes the world even today. Noted French thinker Guy Sorman's words, "..... the Indian mind was better prepared for the chronological mutations of Darwinian evolution and astrophysics..." shook the west. During Vedic period teaching

was the monopoly of Brahmins and teachers had a very high social status and received some kind of remuneration. Whereas with the advent of Buddhism and Jainism education was open to all though it failed to reach out to the masses. All aspects of education was sacred and secular and the teachers were Bhiksus (monks) for teaching males and Bhikshunis (nuns) who generally taught female students. They received no salary, in fact they had to beg for their food. Relationship between teacher and taught was entirely harmonious. The teachers were fully responsible for his/her student's conduct, training and development. They were to provide all kinds of intellectual and spiritual guidance for their students. The student's in exchange would serve their teachers as part of their education. Both teacher and taught were persons of very high ability and character. Such education was very successful in preserving ancient literary and cultural heritage of India and the education system produced men and women eminently qualified to perform their civic and social duties.

### **The Muslim Period Medieval India**

Muslim period, which began in India around the twelfth century, had its own culture and education system and their rulers did not interfere with the education of the Hindus. Muslim education which was derived from the Greeks had little impact on the Indian system. This was mainly because there had been an intellectual exchange of thought between the Greeks and the Indians before the Christian era began. Indian educationists found nothing new to learn from the Muslim conquerors. The system was in two parts. Primary education was confined to 'Maktabs' run by

the mullahs and schools were part of a mosque. Higher education was in Madarsas mainly in large towns. These were financed by the state.

Education system in medieval India was open to all but for many long years Hindus did not go to these schools. Their numbers gradually increased especially when secular education began under the influence of the Mughal Emperor Akbar, who opened a new chapter in the history of education. He encouraged education in every possible way. Scholarships were awarded to deserving students and practical subjects such as agriculture, accountancy and public administration formed part of the curriculum.

### **Teachers Highly Respected**

Teachers were a highly respected lot and their character and spiritual force could never be faulted. Relationship between teacher and taught was like father and son. Students were provided free boarding and lodging just like in the ancient education system in India. There were no fixed study periods; it depended on the ability and capacity of the students. There were no regular annual examinations. No degrees or diplomas were awarded and the student's ability was judged by the reputation of their teachers or the institutions where they received education. In the towns teachers got salaries and village schoolmasters were paid in kind. During this period vocational and commercial education developed. Training in arts and

crafts, painting and music was quite common. Apprenticeship system was also introduced for industrial workers, artisans, most of whom were Muslims. Female education was restricted to princesses and daughters of nobles and other well to do persons in the hands of private tutors. They were taught literature, elementary arithmetic and religious

scriptures. During this period female literacy plummeted. Hardly one in hundred could read. After Akbar none of the rulers showed interest in education and as a result it received a set back and was at its lowest ebb yet. In the seventeenth century no attention was given to the students or their scholarly pursuits. Schools gradually began to fade away. Brahmins once again dominated education.

### **The British Colonial Period**

Then came more than two centuries of British colonial rule, in whose later stages, Gurudev Rabindra Nath Tagore penned those memorable lines at the beginning of this article. Lord Macaulay in 1831 introduced a system of English education aimed purely at churning out natives who left the school with a clerical bent of mind. It was designed only to produce persons who got jobs in offices as clerks and not

**EACH AND EVERY MEMBER  
OF THE HUMAN SOCIETY  
SHOULD ENJOY EQUAL  
RIGHTS AS MEMBERS OF  
THE SAME FAMILY, BUT  
THERE IS DISPARITY**

officers. They were the anglicized Babus, a buffer between the British elite and the Indian masses, and were essential instruments to run the colonial administration. Educationists like Vidyasagar and Rabindra Nath Tagore recognized this deficiency and warned the nation of its dangers, but their pleas fell on deaf ears. Thanks to enlightened British leaders like Lord Rawlinson, the first step to produce officer material in schools came after much resistance many years later with the birth of the RIMC in 1922 and a few others later.

### Education Today

Sadly this flawed system of education continued after independence and continues even half a century later with hardly any change at all. As a result education today still remains as the means for getting a job and not much else. Though it develops the intellect it provides no vision to inculcate the precepts of humanism laid down and practiced in the Vedic times. Though one may have learnt much, one is unable to apply it to practical life. Schools today have forgotten what education really means, that which liberates. They have, barring a few exceptions, become assembly line shop floors that mechanically produce mindless and subservient people, (just what Lord Macaulay wanted). Education today fails to liberate but serves the greed of the present societal systems of the day in the garb of mental progress. Leave alone businessmen, classic examples among professionals are Doctors, Engineers, Lawyers, Scientists and Teachers, etc whose primary motive is to make money first. Ethics for them come later.

Were it not so, there would have been no environmental disasters fuelled by greed, threat of nuclear holocaust, social chaos (read terrorism) and economic ruin that confront us today. So what does one do in this dark tunnel of misery that has engulfed humans and appears to show no signs of abating? Is there an unending light at the end of the tunnel or is it an express train of greed thundering towards us to crush and swallow one and all. Or is there a way out and is there a new system of education, perhaps an ideal one.

### Neo Humanistic Education

Fortunately there could be a new (neo) system, if we were to seriously examine the eclectic system that prevailed during Vedic times and apply suitably those timeless precepts to modern education today. There is a Neo Humanistic Educational (NHE) model, the foundations of which were laid in 1962 by the renaissance man of the twentieth century Shrii P.R. Sarkar. It has a step by step approach to education designed to create individuals who could pave the way for one universal society upon planet Earth. It is the consummation of human efforts of thousands of years

to build an educational system having a unique combination of tradition and modernity, analysis and synthesis, peace and justice, rationality and devotion for the Supreme Consciousness that pervades everything in this universe.

*'Atma Moksharam, Jagat Hitachaye'* Self realization and universal welfare verily the goal of human life, is the goal of Neo Humanistic Education. The primary purpose of education must remain to learn to serve the society and acquire the skills to do so in an effective way. Essentially the NHE model retains the spirit of the ancient Gurukul system of India with a modern secular approach. It is a progressive system that encourages the use of science and technology, the arts for the enrichment of the human race, with the wisdom of arts and literature leading the sciences to preserve the roots of civilization. The concept being arts and science can have no monopoly by individuals or groups but free for all like light and air and others from nature's bounty.

### The NHE Model

Shri Sarkar defined the acronym EDUCATION to comprise of Enlargement of the mind, 'D'ESMEP (Discipline, Etiquette, Smartness, Morality, and English Pronunciation), Universal outlook, Character, Active habits, Truthfulness, Ideation of the Supreme, Omniscient grace and Nice temperament. Based on these essential ingredients of education what naturally follows in the NHE model is to:

- a) Create thirst for knowledge and develop the whole human personality, physical, mental and spiritual.
- b) Make education ethical.
- c) Awaken spiritual awareness.
- d) Have an integrated learning approach.
- e) Cultivate aesthetics in all subjects.
- f) Recognize local and multi cultural practices.
- g) Create a new consciousness for the environment.
- h) Emphasize upon the exemplary role of educators.
- i) Inculcate a spirit of service.
- j) Enlarge social consciousness and a sense of justice.

### Emphasis on Moral Education

The NHE model lays emphasis on moral education. Etiquette and refined behavior though important are not enough. Real education is that which leads to a pervasive sense of love and compassion for all creation. Vocational training according to the natural attributes of students play a vital role in this model. It also advocates a radical change in the examination system to truly assess both the theoretical and applied assimilation of knowledge among the students. It also calls for giving total freedom to



educationists to run the academic aspects in educational institutions without any political or other vested interests. Finally the NHE model strives to build systems based on the foundations of cardinal human values unaffected by the changing values down the ages. It creates a universal consciousness amongst the students, a neo humanistic love for plants, animals and other forms of creation as expressions of that one Supreme entity, a love that transcends all negative sentiments of the day like envy, hatred, greed and others by this holistic approach to education.

### **NHE Curriculum**

Some of these ideals may seem lofty, utopian and appear impossible in the so-called practical world today. They may be difficult but achievable. And the person who can make it possible is the teacher, provided, there is no interference in his work. He needs to be suitably trained and imbibe a few values to formulate a curriculum of study, based on universal values of love and ethics as given below:

- a) Morning Circle - Teaching aspects of self-withdrawal, periods of meditative silence for different age groups.
- b) Classroom Management - Creating a stress free environment of neo humanistic values.
- c) Social Studies - Analyzing history and teaching values that enlarge the mind and promote a universal brotherhood contrary to today's discriminative society, and opposing culture not based on timeless moral values.
- d) Literature - Selecting books for students, that broadens their culture, inspires them to strive towards greater heights of perfection and instill high moral values.
- e) Science - Providing an internalized and ecological approach that highlights the interface of life and its ethical applications.
- f) Computers - Preparing software and using it

appropriately without in any way affecting the human relationship between teacher and taught.

- g) Art, Music, Drama - Practicing fine arts as an integral part of all subjects.
- h) Ecology - Understanding, teaching and practicing ecologically sound habits in daily life.
- i) Following the discipline and etiquette of the school.
- j) Finally it is the teacher exemplary personified who fosters the 'elan vital' of culture and civilization.

### **Time for a new Holistic Look**

The present education system prevailing in the country and most of the world has failed to solve major global problems for e.g. environmental degradation caused due to excessive greed; commercialisation of arts, literature and sports with its harmful effects; the march of science, in fact scientific extravaganza which has little use for the human race as a whole. The list can go on and on with apparently no end. Schools and colleges today are only looked upon as pathways for future job seekers, in which the students neither learn much, nor remember much, and they can make very little practical use of what little they may have learnt. As the old system has failed, it is time to look for a new holistic one.

When in a school one has a thirst for knowledge, when spiritual awareness awakens, when educators are exemplary personified, with freedom to pursue the academic curriculum without interference, then and only then can schools produce benevolent moralists, humans of strength and character, ready to fight injustice and exploitation in society and create a paradise on planet Earth, build a universal human society ready to journey to the stars. And all share and enjoy the immeasurable bounty of the boundless universe so .....

'Sam'gacchadhvam Sam'vadadhvam'

Let us move together, let us sing together ■