



NEED AND ROLE OF SPIRITUAL EDUCATION IN TEACHER EDUCATION IN MODERN TIMES

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Abstract

The world has gone through momentous changes from time to time and these definitely are times of change. The changes are on an unprecedented scale in our social, mental, emotional, economic and spiritual arenas. Our children will have to deal with even far greater realities than we do today. With the onslaught of technology and media; the students today are far more exposed to the harsh realities than ever. On one hand they have more technology and on the other they have less emotional and spiritual understanding, making them successful students and entrepreneurs but losing out on the human aspect in life. Once spiritual education becomes an integral part of teacher education, it will automatically spiral down to the students and into the society as teachers are the makers of men! Yet our education system seems ill-equipped to give them the wherewithal to deal with all these in an effective way which is seen from “greater degrees and lesser jobs, greater sites but lesser social interactions and rising depression and student suicides in India”

Key words- Teacher education, Pre service training , spiritual training to teachers , pre-service education



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Introduction:

“Our education system is such that our students today feel that Vedas and scriptures are completely irrelevant and the best would be to look away from it.....they are forgetting that these books gave millions of people the character and knowledge far exceeding any theoretical book and helped them succeed in lifesadly, this is what the modern education has done to the young minds!”

- Dr APJ Abdul Kalam¹

Well it might sound a bit harsh but these words of the great visionary and youth icon – Dr Kalam; actually puts the picture of our education in front of us as it is. Our students have theoretical knowledge but not the spiritual knowledge and the strong character that is required to be successful and it begins in school with teachers. And hence, it is imperative that teachers too have spiritual education as a part of their pre-service education.

Because as Dr Kalam says in his book ; “The wings of Fire”“A nation’s students are just as enlightened as its teachers!” Unless the teachers awake the students cannot and hence he gave a lot of stress on teacher education and gave away many prizes to teachers in his tenure as the President of India.

The world has gone through momentous changes from time to time and these definitely are times of change. The changes are on an unprecedented scale in our social, mental, emotional, economic and spiritual arenas. Our children will have to deal with even far greater realities than we do today. Yet are education system seems ill-equipped to give them the wherewithal to deal with all these in an effective way which is seen from “ *greater degrees and lesser jobs, greater sites but lesser social interactions and rising depression and student suicides in India*” as cited by the **NHRC and SIDH report 2011-12**.²

Need for spiritual education in pre-service teacher training

Jiddu Krishnamurti the great educationist points to the solution for this problem by saying – “What one is inwardly will eventually bring about a good society or the gradual deterioration of mankind...hence start work within.”

The question we need to look at together is how spirituality can be part of education and for that it has to be a part of teacher education, first because it is said ‘*what a teacher has learnt is what he can teach*’.³

“Only in a country of learned, spiritually awakened teachers are men of character born and hence the need for developing such great teachers.”⁴

But, many do ask why spiritual education for pre-service teacher education? The answer to this question could be given through a metaphor- In sweetened milk sugar is not visible but its presence is felt by its pleasant taste. All of us prefer to drink sweetened milk than to drink raw milk and eat sugar afterwards. Hence it has to be incorporated at the stage of pre-service teacher training only. While one is being trained to be a teacher if spiritual education is also given then only one’s training to be a complete teacher is possible. We can look at several important reports that cite the need for spiritual education in teacher education. Some of these are:-

a) **UNESCO Commission Report, “Education for the 21st Century - Learning the Treasure Within** ,”⁵ e m p h a s i s h a s b e e n l a i d o n reorientation of pre-service and in-service teacher education for enabling teachers in acquiring spiritual education.

National Policy on Education (NPE) which also guides the Action Programme for teacher education

And also in the National Commission on Teachers (NCT) 1983 it was laid down that ‘pre-service teacher education must have clear objectives for the teaching profession with reference to the search for excellence, breadth of vision and cultivation of values..’.⁶

Defining Spirituality in Teacher Education

We need a definition because it gives us a base from which to begin our own exploration especially about spirituality because, “Spirituality” is an enigmatic word with a variety of definitions- some compelling, some mysterious, some difficult to fathom yet the most common understanding of the word spirituality is this- it is the yearning to connect with something larger than just one’s own ego needs.

Let us be clear from the outset we are talking about spiritual and not religious education. “Set of values and beliefs universal to the well being of mankind that allows him to think above his own selfish self” is the lexical meaning of “Spirituality” according to the Cambridge Dictionary.

The Jews call it the “Spark of the Divine”, the Christians call it the “Spirit”, the Parsis call it the “Inner Teacher”, secularists call it identity and integrity and psychologists call it “individuation”.

The opinion of the Vedic Rishi is: "swadhyaya pravacana eva-eti tapas" - "study and teaching alone are true tapas the best tapas, the best form of human effort.

Cheap Education and the business oriented thinking of some educationists has made education purely as a money- earning process; so much investment and so much output .

“On the one hand, we cultivate knowledge about nature, matter, science, and so on, and totally disregard probably the one most important thing in life, which is the nature and working of our own mind. Surely, that is ignorance and that is what we should seek to remove through spiritual education!”⁷ - Jiddu Krishnamurthy

Hence we may say that the aim is to make the teachers a thinking, aware beings; aware of their own self, their own mind and spirit, so that they can guide students towards self-discovery and discovery of worldly truths as well.

Scope of spiritual education in pre service teacher training

That’s a major question of debate. Is the spirit an entity that exists is highly debatable and more than that, can we really educate someone’s spirit as spirituality demands? If we can, what will be its scope? What all will it cover?

Well, if we follow only disciplinary content and pedagogical technique in pre service teacher education it is extremely difficult to give spiritual education to someone as a course. It will again be restricted to being a theoretical subject and even in that what will be its scope – that is a big challenge But otherwise yes, we can mould his thinking and touch his soul. The education of the soul is surely difficult but not impossible. The attitudes, the thinking and the perspective of a human mind can be changed through intense discussions, giving ideals in front of him/her and thus opening the gates of his own mind and the powers of his mind to him.

As Swami Vivekanand says, “Education is the manifestation of perfection already present in man”, this manifestation has to be awakened in each and every student-teacher at the time of teacher education. The ***‘gift of a true teacher is not his technical mastery—but his mastery of his own inner life.’***⁸

Some examples of teaching Spirituality in teacher education

"Courage to Teach" (CTT) programs begun in 1998 are now found in some thirty-two cities around the US, under the guidance of Rick and Marcy Jackson, co-directors of the Center for Teacher Formation, working in collaboration with a national network of CTT facilitators and the Fetzer Institute. ⁹X

The Courage to Teach programme consists of eight modules of weekend retreats spread over two years of spiritual education, which every student teacher has to attend, under the guidance of a trained facilitator. The purpose of these groups is to research their own mind, its working and work on it!” It is a mandatory course for all teacher –trainers in US and now also in France

In 2001, for example, the **Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education (ACGME), USA**—which accredits the eight thousand medical residency programs in US — also adopted the CTT as well.

Why did a medical council pick such a programme?

Because many doctors fear that their profession is "losing its soul" and becoming too commercialized and hence the need for spiritual education.

If the link between soul and role is so critical in medicine, surely the same is true in education, where the relation of teacher and student is deeply human for real learning to occur.

c) Closer home we have **The Ramakrishna**

Institute of Moral and Spiritual Education (RIMSE), Mysore,⁹ has been conducting a value oriented B.Ed. course for over 25 years now and has been a pioneer in spiritual education in teacher education. It is cited as a model institute by NCTE for spiritual education to teacher trainees.

V.A "spiritual" Pedagogy

"Only a mind in silence and stability is a mind that can learn anything.....or even teach anything"

In practical terms, this question takes us toward autobiographical reflection, sharing childhood stories that reveal something of who we were before our deformations set in. Through such story-telling, and silence and meditation a man can know about the working of his own mind.

Great teachers tell us that when they start seeing what is dormant in themselves, they become better able to see what is dormant in their students—"My teacher saw something in me that I did not see in myself." This is, of course, the gift Mr. Porter gave to the young blind James Baldwin who became America's most prolific writers of fiction.

Moral Components advocated by John Wilson for CTT¹⁰

1. A deep concern for others- developing the principles of kindness, sympathy, dignity, altruism, courtesy and equality towards all.

An awareness of self and others feelings.

Ability to take a decision: — moral education must train the person to be able to take the right decision involving justice, wisdom, temperance etc.

5. Will to act on the decision with courage, duty, responsibility etc.

Kay Williams Traits for spiritual development¹¹

1. Ability to make right moral judgments

2. Ability to postpone instant gratification of desires 3. Courtesy to treat other human beings with dignity⁷

Ability to be flexible in making moral judgments

Ability to be creative and dynamic in moral decisions.

RIMES' spiritual development Mantra

- Kuvempu's Panchamantra: (Five Doctrines)
- Manujamatha (Universal man) _ The religion of man should make him a universal man.
- Vishwapatha (Universal Path) _ The path should be the universal path without barriers of colour, religion, caste etc
- Sarvodaya (Welfare of all) _ bond of love, broad outlook and concern for others .
- Samanvaya (Harmony)- no dividing lines between any individuals or levels of society
- Poorna Drishti (Integral vision) - entire humanity as one universal and absolute being.

Methodology of imparting spiritual education -

Social and ethical values, examples from day-to-day situations, extracts from sayings of great men, incidents and problems which develop value judgment among pupils, dramas, dialogues, and scriptures from world religions along with the biographies of great men are studied.

- ✓ Personal, neighborly and community issues are discussed with the students.
- ✓ Yoga for self-discipline among students.
- ✓ Community work like cleaning slums, service campus, visits to hospitals, etc.
- ✓ Discourses on the lives of spiritual leaders.
- ✓ 'Personality Development Retreats'
- ✓ Prayer, meditation and 'Shramadan' or acts to show 'dignity of labour'.
- ✓ Observing 'Jayantis' i.e., birthdays of great national and spiritual leaders and organizing youth organizations for character development can go a long way in the inculcation of spiritual values in students.

Conclusion

In today's teacher education pedagogy is there enough impetus given to teachers to help them understand their open self and be a better person and a role model for all the students to emulate? Are we doing enough to help teachers-in-training understand their responsibility as great "makers and shapers" of society? Too often, the answer is no.

- There are two challenges that may have to be faced in providing value orientation to teacher education – one is the content and the other is the attitude of those that teach this content and those that make its pedagogy.
- The National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE) is well aware of this challenge. The foci of its recent initiatives have been on developing resource materials on indigenous thoughts on education and production of multimedia resource materials on it.
- For e . g . CD's on Education for Character Development; Education for Tomorrow; Role and Responsibility of Teachers in Building up Modern India; Sri Aurobindo on Education, Knowing your true self-by Dr. Radhakrishna etc.
- Secondly, the problem is that most teacher trainees are only concerned with getting a job and making a living, they want the information and skills required to get a secure employment—no less, and no more. In fact, efforts to go into spiritual realms meets with determined resistance from students, and managements.
- So why do they resist addressing spiritual issues in the classroom? Because we are told from an early age that school is not the place to bring out questions of meaning of life: take it home, or to the religious head but do not bring them to school. So this has to change through awareness.
- Actually we pay heavily for a system of education so fearful of soulful things that it fails to address the real issues of our lives, and alienates the human spirit and most people are spiritually empty at their best.
- If you educate teachers' hearts and souls, it deepens their relations with students, restores community life, and leads to self-improvement and personal development of the students as well. Each teacher is different and unique, much like the students, and makes a special and unique contribution to the society.

I conclude with this quote from J. G. Bennett:

“What we want to do with children should be a response to what we have already done with student-teachers...rather than an attempt to instill or teach them anything new.”

Let's not lose our life in living as we've lost our wisdom in learning!- Sydney Portier
(Educator and Nobel laureate)

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