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### **Challenges to Education: Perspectives and Prospects**

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Many-a-times we refer to the present many-fold ideals and hence problems in the field of education, viz. education as knowledge-building device, education as means to earn livelihood, education for value-inculcation, education for development of personality, education for providing scope to actualise potentialities, education for boosting innovative thinking, education for qualitative excellence, education for democratic well-being, education for masses, etc.. And point out that it is necessary to set the priorities in their cultural context, and hold their proper inter-relations in the light of aims of education simultaneously.

As all of us are aware, Lord (Thomas Babington) Macaulay (25<sup>th</sup> Oct. 1800 – 28<sup>th</sup> Dec. 1859) is said to be the founder of modern education. Lord Macaulay, it seems, was influenced by two important personalities: Madame (Maria) Montessori (31<sup>st</sup> Aug. 1870 – 6<sup>th</sup> May 1952), who made experiments and attempts to bring in reforms in the then prevalent systems of education in the West on the one hand and Bertrand Russell (18 May 1872 – 2 Feb. 1970), who provided philosophical insights on the other; and both of them provided an impetus. B. Russell, perhaps, was attempting to criticise the authoritarian Catholic mode of education, and bring in reforms through protest, though apparently remaining within the framework of Christianity. He intended to retain the general framework of ancient educational system and amalgamate insights provided by the Ancient Civilisations especially the ancient Indian universities. He stressed on Christian values, viz. loving kindness and freedom essential to develop an individual, like the one practised by Buddhism. *Prima facie* his aim was to find out a via-media between the then French Protestant and Roman Catholic modes of education, but his attempt was, perhaps, to synthesise vision of the

Eastern Ancient Civilisations in the content of education with that of the Christian framework of the West. He was very much influenced by the Oriental values inculcated by the Ancient education systems, yet interested in preserving strictness of rules-abiding framework of the West. Though he has not visited India but it was through Russia he came to know about Indian values. Thus, it is synthesis which is a result of various cultures which B. Russell is bringing out and that may shade some light to our present educational problems.

Hence, now if we the Indians wish to have reforms in tune with our patriotic form of articulating education-policies, we will have to re-search for our own indigenous frameworks and grounds rooted in Nationalism, nonetheless we should retain rules-abiding governance and strictness in education. In order to have truly independent Indian National Education policy, use of modern methods and means seems to be profitable and necessary, but preservation of our own rich value-systems in an innovative way seems to be in order. This can be done not *via* imbibing ready-made Western frameworks, and transplanting them on Indian soil under the garb of globalisation; but by direct method approach to re-discover/re-investigate our own Ancient Indian systems of education. And it is this, which I intend to hint at in this paper.

Beginning with this introduction, let me turn to its argumentative form and content. It has three sections. Unless we note the ground-reality at present, and the issues expected to be confronted essentially and minimally, we cannot hope to proceed. And hence the first section deals with presenting facts. In brief, it revolves around: what are the problems and challenges in the contemporary world with reference to education. Immediately a question arises: if there are problems, why they emerge? Thus, in the second section, I shall attempt to search roots of the problems, due to confusion/misunderstanding about and the lack of meaning of true education and its aims appropriate even within the changing circumstances and situations in which we live and use education as a means to make our life meaningful. But merely stating facts and spelling out the reasons is not enough, in any philosophical inquiry one has to respond to challenges – bring out its present relevance and hint at the need and prospects of articulating the appropriate policies. Naturally in the last section, my endeavour will be to find out solutions, if possible to be implemented. This is how the

entire exercise is attempted to be carried out in the framework of philosophy of education.

### **Section-I: Contemporary Problems and Threats**

If we glance at the present problems in the field of education, we notice that education has been used as an instrument not only to earn livelihood, but it is used as a power to dominate others and the world at large. No body in the contemporary world is using education as a means to get peace and perfection, or as a way towards developing insight and ultimately enlightenment. All such ideals it seems have become out-dated and irrelevant. At present money/market-oriented education is predominant, and instrumental value is the indicator of educational productivity/relevance. Secondly, there is inherent lack of flexibility/freedom for the development of potentialities – regarding knowledge, skills and attitudes required for effective participation in the society to live as a truly human being. Thirdly, formal education and paper qualifications have become proofs for establishing oneself to be knowledgeable and learned. Fourthly, people are carried away by *prima-facie* things, rather than going into in-depth understanding of realities and developing insights. Fifthly, peace and satisfaction which is the true goal of human life is remaining as only motto theoretically and hypocritically. Every body is aware that it is not a sustainable growth and development of human beings. But numerical growth and outward exhibition of development have now become the marks of education in the domain of modernization/globalisation. There is confusion between knowledge and information. In such a superficial growth we have lost our integrity and humanity. And lastly, all are talking about lack of moral values and degradation of quality in the field of education, which seems to have become a universal phenomenon. Is it going to help us in long run? Nobody bothers.

Knowing this prevalent world-wide danger and problems, UNESCO is now talking about the need of value-inculcation through education and development of moral aspect of human personality. Knowledge commission of India recently too has stressed on understanding education not merely as conceptual/abstract/theoretical superficial-growth, but development of potentialities – regarding knowledge, skills and attitudes required to integrate man as civilised and cultured person. It is realized and hence stressed that education should be based on learning from experience, use balanced-ways of developing personality traits, and aim at innovative methods/

techniques of knowing things. It should be holistic development of human life and not segregative modes of understanding human life and the world.

Nonetheless restricting ourselves to Indian context, all are aware and acknowledge the age-old facts and objectives that discovery of truth is the ultimate goal of human life, and education should be in tune with such aims. However, why we have come to the present state of the situation (even though we are aware of our rich past)? is million dollar question. Our awareness of the present state of affair and contrastively our rich-historical past compel us to search for the reasons behind. Obviously we have to turn to such an inquiry and find out reasons which have lead to contemporary problems and hence we proceed to it in the next section.

### **Section-II: Reasons behind the Contemporary Problems**

When we wish to inquire into present problems, we find their roots in predominance of non-Indian thoughts – especially British systems or Colonial modes of understanding still lingering in its impact and coupled with it at under the sway of globalisation presently American ideals and ways dominating on all spheres of life and especially in the field of education. Our intellectual exercises and plans and policies in various fields are either swinging their pendulum to Russian/Marxist socialism controlling once-upon-a-time in Neharuian regime – depicted in our agenda that India as secular Socialist country. We though take pride in biting the drums of our rich past or else claim to be accommodative and flexible to all kinds of forces but in doing so lose our marks of our cultural heritage or else are ignorant truly of our Civilisational uniqueness and hence stand no where in the scenario of world map. Democracy is lost in the hegemony of aristocracy on the one hand and bureaucracy on the other. Education at present is used as a means to become free in self-centred manner. It is making man to think of material gains as the only value and hedonistic pleasures as the sole aim of life. Educated people are seen to be behaving not in social way, but remaining aloof preferably living in ivory-towers indifferent to social problems. Under the name of socialism and secularism we have lost the proper sense of equality and justice originated in our cultural and religious milieu. Unity of Civilisation and diversity of culture has remained only verbal motto instead of being lived and practised. Instead of distributing knowledge gained by education, knowledge has turned as a weapon to be misused as a hostile-power of nuisance. Really speaking knowledge makes one humble, but today due to the lack of value-education and proper role-models being imbibed by present youth, arrogance and acts

of destruction is rampantly seen dominating in all spheres and in the field of education too. With the help of money and muscle, educators/teachers are dominated and obviously same is percolated in the educational institutions. Instead of inner development, educators are controlled/governed by number-game productivity outcomes policies. In short, there is at least to some extent chaos and confusion in the field of education, nonetheless the picture is not completely gloomy.

It is a result, perhaps, because after independence formulation of constructive policies embedded in true Nationalism on institutional levels, unfortunately was not much taken seriously as it should have been. It is required for ourselves being truly independent and free, where freedom is understood democratically both on individual and institutional levels not only restrictively to politics and administration but in thoughts and actions in all fields. Nationalism and individualism in the Indian context at least can go hand-in-hand, if freedom and independence are appropriately connected in the framework of justice and equality democratically. This was indeed practiced in the ancient past and it is acknowledged to some extent but unfortunately clearly and powerfully not implemented in our policies. On the one hand we were biting the drums of rich past, but not knowing exact contributions and uniqueness of our richness Civilisational and Cultural, hence taking honour mere superficially. And one other hand unwilling to contrast and compare to examine critically strengths and weakness of our indigenous traditions, and hence carried away by what others say/hold as true. And thus for many years we were following the British/Western/Colonial forms of thinking as standards and neglecting to indigenous ideas. Even today when we come to know that many thoughts they have imbibed from us, then only we are ready to take it as valuable. Consequently, to some extent at least we are carried away by aspectival considerations of man and his life or the world and correspondingly it is reflected in education especially blindly following Western systems.

In this context I do not wish to undermine the significant contributions of Indian thinkers and policy-makers of education after independence, like Gandhiji. Rather, one cannot brush aside their consensuous attempts and hence focussing light on their attempts too is essential. Educationists are the architects and builders of human beings and correspondingly of Nation, but after independence the role of education is markedly highlighted. They were aware that political will and individual inner power taken together can enable one to exercise manifestation of innovative and

constructive free-play of inner potentialities. Nonetheless, at the same time under the sway of modernisation and now various forms of globalisation, each one of us at present is carried away by flimsy fashions, under the name of freedom in anarchic manner and independence in the sense of licentiousness. Indigenous value-oriented atmosphere is sabotaged by the idea of modernisation. Under the name of experimentation, lot of trials and tests are conducted in the field of education, but very few have truly paid attention to indigenous philosophical thoughts behind education and their essential interconnection with ideals of human life and hence failures are seen.

On this background there is a need to clearly comprehend our duties and responsibilities as teachers and educators in the sense of nation-builders. Each one of us has to think and act responsibly – contribute our might towards not only following the policies blindly and rigidly, but individually attempt to constructively and innovatively set a role-model. There is a hope to rediscover the inner strengths and potentialities on the one hand, and rejuvenate our age-old rich systems by assimilating and adjusting with the present-day technological culture on the other. It is replacement of defective methods to be in tune with globalisation, yet it is not permitting superficial modes of modernisation to take toll. These constraints should be paid enough attention to while formulating indigenous policies in any field, and to which education should not be an exception. Hence, it becomes essential to re-visit and inquire into the field of philosophy of education, and search for the appropriate policies useful to confront changing situations and circumstances in which we live and desire to progress truly. Obviously, ready-made policies and solutions to the present problems will not be there, but one will have to undertake the exercise of reinterpretation and re-understanding the historical past to make it relevant for the present-day. It is thus essential to attempt to find out solutions to the present problems, instead of merely acknowledging the problems and their reasons theoretically and remaining aloof in practice.

Very recently knowledge-commission has attempted in this way and given a ray of hope to respond in that direction, but still there is a scope to improvise in order to integrate and have clarity in-depth about ideals of human life and essential role of education in fulfilling it. This paper is a humble attempt in the direction of finding out appropriate philosophical thoughts and ideas corresponding to the aims and objectives

of human life in general on the one hand and highlighting how it is in consonance with the interest of our Nation. We address ourselves to that in the next section.

### **Section-III: Prospective Directions**

To know the ultimate truth is the goal of human life, but the content of truth changes contextually - from person-to-person, place-to-place and time-to-time. If there is nothing mystical and religious/sacred (meaning) involved in it, and it is an exercise systematically and objectively carried out; then only it can truly become universally humane. While living life each one has to earn one's own livelihood, get aesthetic joy, live morally and transcend the limitations – inner and/or outer– to get peace and contentment/satisfaction. And for this everybody requires certain kind of skills and needs to acquire knowledge for effectively attempting to live and develop towards the ideals cherished by one and all. In India right from ancient times no one has understood man fragmentarily and segregated individual from others – living as well as non-living and the world at large. It is important to note here that in India all traditions have emphasised on the view that man is a part of nature and hence no one has advocated anthropocentric perspective of human life, or treated man like a machine; but man is part of the world. Every one insisted on true development along with not only human society but all – the entire world at large. It is a holistic understanding and hence our perspective to look at education too is obviously holistic.

Aims and objectives of education and life are not separate, but they are essentially inter-connected and inter-dependent. What we think and speak comes from our life experience/practices, and hence primacy is given to practice than mere abstract theoretical understanding. Obviously learning through experience and while living practising the thoughts entrained is appropriately exercised. Education for us means becoming perfect based on and through experiences, reflections and contemplations – either of ourselves or of our forefathers and contemporaries. Insightfulness does not emerge by living in ivory-towers, but after going through toil and turmoil one learns and gets a chance to have some glimpses of truths to be lived. Hence, while living we learn and for living we are required to learn. It is this unending process which enables us to adjust with the surrounding in which we are placed, but there is a chance to know ourselves and manifest various forms of potentialities – known and unknown – through transcending the limitations (inner and outer) and assimilating the changes for our self-transformation. Obviously, education

does not remain merely as a tool to earn money and get material gains, but it indeed provides a scope to enjoy – individually as well as collectively – and emancipate truly. Such a sense of education is neither a selfish development nor a segregative mode to earn money/power/fame, nor further something sacred. This being the case, it automatically preserves the humanitarian values and turns out to be a secular emancipatory exercise. No one is born perfect but can become perfect, provided one learns and educates oneself and others how to become perfect.

I wish to bring in here one important thought given in the *ĪūraĒgama sŪtra*, where nature of genuine knowledge is discussed by Mahayana Buddhism. According to it, it is essential to follow the path of insightfulness (*purvaabhĀga-partipad*) and marching towards enlightenment (*lokottara-mĀrga*), as any true knowledge (*Bodhi*) consists in both. Further, there is nothing sacred in following the eightfold path (*Astangika-marga*) led down by the Buddha; rather it enables us to learn how to confront fundamentalism and extremism – the present day hurdles in peace and progress of all. It is essential to teach/learn how to follow middle-way (*Madhyama-pratipada*) at various stages, while educating oneself from primary stage of schooling. Inquisitiveness to know the facts of life and the world can be developed by learning to become rational and critical in different spheres. This is embedded in the self-orientation, which can be trained by adopting the four values given by the Buddha, the great teacher of wisdom, viz. love and friendship (*Maitri*), compassion (*KaruĒĀ*), appreciative-joy (*MuditĀ*) and equanimity (*UpekĀ*). And by learning them one not only knows but is also trained to cultivate the three important aspects of our personality viz. cultivating wisdom/constructing knowledge (*Adhi-prajñĀ*), building moral character through affection and compassion, which can be depicted in performance based actions (*Adhi-Īlā*); and cultivation of emotion and mental peace (*Adhi-SamĀdhi*). It is a course of action to be performed and practiced for the development of skills and integration of personality in order to be human. That alone is a right sign of oneself being truly educated and learned.

On this background when we study the historical past and learn about the richness of it, we come to know that in ancient times democratically all were permitted to learn, and freedom was given to all to choose the type/forms of courses of education taking into account one's own potentialities. It is a fact that taking into consideration likings of the students, universities were also providing specializations to develop skills of the concerned candidates, but such learning was not superficial



specialisation or appearance of training, it was a genuine urge to know. There was no restriction on admission in Kashi or Mithila, on the one hand and Nalanda, Taksasila, Vikramasila, Odantapuri, Valbhi, etc. on the other. Rather, it was a healthy atmosphere of give and take, and we know that various Buddhist scholars like Nagarjuna, Asanga, Dinnaga, Dharmakirti etc. have first taken traditional training in the Grammar and Śāṅkhya, and then later on they were the teachers at Taksasila, Vikramasila etc. Both house-holders and *Parivrajakas* – men and women – were departed education for their progress/perfection. According to changing circumstances and situations education enables us to learn the skills to adapt with sustainable development and transform ourselves and that was properly acknowledged by Classical Indian Buddhism. Knowledge does not constitute only truth in what it is, but it also contains/consists of knowing in how to practice and make use of what is known. In whichever field it may be, to educate is to march towards peace and perfection giving satisfaction.

In the present situation of crisis, if we try to pay attention to some such thoughts and ideas prevalent in our historical past, we may perhaps get direction to solve our present day problems and can exercise possibilities in an innovative way by responding to them appropriately. It can provide alternative models to learning, if not completely at least partially to presently prevalent ones, at least. And some such insights provided in the ancient past can be made use of, if possible while formulating educational policies is a hope worth to be cherished. Insights provided by Classical Indian Buddhism are not restrictively to be understood in religious, regional and temporal contexts of the past, but they have true relevance and significance at present too in various fields of knowledge and education is not exception to it. In the sway of globalisation or changing frameworks of space and time too, it can be used as a golden-coin universally, and it will be a true tribute to our history-makers of the rich past.