

EDUCATION AND THE CHALLENGES IN THE FIRST MILLENIUM OF 21st CENTUARY

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PAPER PRESENTED AT GOLDEN JUBILEE CONFERENCE OF INTERNATIONAL SCHOOLS ASSOCIATION HELD AT JAIPUR, INDIA FROM 5-8 JULY 2001

Man civilization is about to enter a phase of evolution that poses a serious threat to the survival of the weakest among mankind, if not to the whole species. Population explosion, pollution and environmental degradation on one hand and the expansion of technology, the boost it has given to industrial production possibilities and the dominant role it threatens to play in human life on the other hands has created a situation in which the big buyers alone can survive. They alone will be able to buy clean air, water and food and the technology developed to ensure survival in the contaminated world of tomorrow. They will also be able to engage commandoes to protect themselves from organized crime. The situation will force the remnants of society to live in a state of slavery and serfdom, as was the case in medieval times. Worse than that it will destroy human civilization since survival will be the sole meaning, purpose and objective of life in such a scenario. All that will remains then will be a flicker of hope borne of the conviction that the principle of evolution won't permit annihilation since "The Universe", as Paul Davies says, "was denied to create life", not to destroy it and "The moral purpose introduced into the evolutionary process after the advent of man" still remains, so does the "content of consciousness as the common ground of all humanity". Also, humans have not yet lost their natural capacity to acquire knowledge and use it to solve their problems. Moreover they have a tendency to feel dissatisfied with life working entirely for themselves as "kinship and reciprocity are embedded in the mind" of man and still find expression in family, friendship and good neighbourliness, which have so far been the guiding principles of social organization.

Man's quest for knowledge, kinship and closeness with nature has helped him create not only artifacts but also a parallel world of sound, shape, sense, colour and thought to satisfy his inner urges and spiritual learning's. Fortunately, the urge has not died down yet, at least not entirely. All the same, the threat of "mass extinctions arising naturally from the intrinsic instability of the evolving system's *Kauffman* puts it, still persists in the possible nightmarish situation of the future with the rift between man and society and between man and nature turning him against life itself. The rift between subject and object, between mind and environment represents an existential dilemma and threatens to snap the chord intrinsic to them.

The assumption that “Mind is the mirror image of reality” was based on the understanding that the universe is ordered and rule-governed, that it has an inbuilt mechanism to sustain its balance and uphold its purpose i.e. creation of life. However, the forces at work today consuming more than nature can offer, producing more toxic substances than it can contain etc. seem to operate against the principle. More than that they have generated changes that are too rapid for the mind to assimilate. As a result, the new reality has yet to take shape in the human mind and make communication about it possible.

Nature’s capacity to sustain an ever-increasing population with unending demands on it has diminished considerably over the years, particularly, in non-affluent societies. Worse than that, air, water and earth that sustained its health have been polluted to such an extent that we need expensive technologies to cleanse them for use by humankind as it is unlikely for humans to adapt themselves to live in a polluted atmosphere or learn to live on polluted air, water and food i.e. to live on poison. Also, we have yet to develop simple and inexpensive technologies to protect ourselves from the possible furies of Nature should it decide to retaliate with all its elemental might.

The scenario that will emerge in the coming decades-contaminated air, water and food, crowd contending for survival in a situation of scarcity of resources, means and opportunities; organized crime, etc., will need both wisdom and knowledge to redeem it. Wisdom to exercise self-restraint and knowledge to answer problems of poverty, disease and discrimination. We need philosophy to instill purpose and meaning into life and technology to satisfy its civilized needs. The main objectives of education in such a situation should therefore be: to generate awareness about the implications of the existential dilemma humans face and equip them with wisdom, knowledge and character necessary to resolve it or allow them to exercise their own choice and independence. It will also necessitate a shift in approach and emphasis in the teaching-learning process, a shift from memorization to assimilation, from detailed description to its relationship to the twin-concerns of life i.e. restoration of sanity to life and replenishment of its resource-base.

It is impossible to fight or even control the process of evolution. Humans have not yet developed the technology to accelerate, retard or contain its forces either. They can do nothing about it if unprecedented increase in population and its repercussions on life and nature are part of an evolutionary design. However, they can still hold back the forces they themselves have generated. This is possible only when we use education as a vehicle of culture, philosophical thought and scientific knowledge and allow it to act as a catalyst of change-social, economic and political and make it a collective movement for a more sensible and saner world order.

The creation of a saner and self-sustaining world order depends on the pursuit and presence of peace the world over, and peace is impossible so long as politics of power dominates world affairs. Even the pursuit of power over men, materials and machines is detrimental to peace since conflict is intrinsic to such a situation. Education for peace, productivity and partnership therefore is the only answer to the material and non-material

problems we face today; education as religion (faith), as philosophy (insight) and as knowledge (freedom) so that we don't have to lament like *T.S.Eliot*, who said "Where is the life we have lost in living?"

The dichotomy between 'life' and 'living' implicit in *Eliot's* observation is an expression or rather an extension of the rift between mind and matter; between subject and object. His statement is a telling comment on the life styles, value systems and thought patterns of the modern world. It also highlights the irony intrinsic to its pursuits and seems to suggest that material prosperity alone does not necessarily promote humanity among humankind.

Eliot laments about "the wisdom we have lost in knowledge and the knowledge we have lost in information" it raises some pertinent questions not only about the production, propagation and practice of knowledge but also about the exercise of power it promotes. He also tends to reject the view that 'knowledge is the sumumbonum of life'. It can be an instrument of human welfare only if it is tempered with wisdom.

It is debatable to contend that wisdom and compassion (humanity) can be taught and that education has a transcendental role as well. However, it is time we realized that the existential dilemma we face today can only be resolved by transcending ourselves by stepping out of the rat – race and replacing self-indulgence with self restraint and that education alone can help the individuals to rise above themselves in order to merge into the universal self and identify with the commonality of consciousness. This elevation of man from indulgence to empathy can be possible if we use education as an instrument of self development and self knowledge and help people rise above themselves in thought, act and expression.

The transcendental role of education involves freedom from all kinds of want' and that too, not by denying life of exercising self-abnegation but by fulfilling its legitimate demands while still being aware of the needs of others and their right to freedom and dignity; in short, by being more human. All the same, the question still remains whether the teaching community will show courage to step out of the pattern and assert its identity and authority by rejecting all that it has stood for! Will society allow it the freedom? Perhaps not. Not until it has the wisdom to recognize that man is the only animal that is capable both of self-transcendence and wholesale destruction, and that he will continue to have a piecemeal approach to problems until he realizes the fundamental unity of all creation,' deals with life as a whole', develops what Russell calls 'a sense of the whole human race as a cooperative unit' and evolves a system of education that would, according to Krishnamurthi: create whole and integrated human beings with a concern for the whole of freedom from all kinds of inadequacy ; physical, emotional , intellectual, moral, psychological and spiritual and fulfilment resulting from freedom, from a life lived fully, purposefully and transcendently.