

PRIORITIES OF EDUCATION IN NEW DECADE

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The twentieth century was one of the most remarkable periods of human history. It experienced the trauma of two world wars, set up the League of Nations and the UNO to settle disputes, saw the rise and fall of imperialism and ideology and witnessed other events equally global in character. It has also left behind the vision of 'One World One Future' and a wealth of knowledge and wisdom to guide humankind to realize it.

India has been heir to the legacy described above. It also has been witness to great achievements as well as dismal failures during century. Its most valuable legacy to posterity is democracy and its greatest failure the perpetuation of disparities even years after the attainment of independence. However, it is the latter that will decide not only the course of events in the twenty-first century but also the future of democracy in India. Other developments that would help shape the future of the country are:

- i. increase in pollution and environmental degradation,
- ii. Increasing stronghold of a callous and corruptible administrative set-up without any worthwhile mechanism for the redress of public grievances.
- iii. Mismanagement of national wealth and its inequitable distribution,
- iv. Loss of faith in institutions and protest movements, and
- v. erosion of moral values from public life.

These developments have already generated certain trends and traditions, which are likely to play a decisive role in the next decade. Some of these are:

- i. Drift and disharmony,
- ii. Anonymity and loss of identity,
- iii. Stress and sterility of ideas,
- iv. Ecological imbalance and marginalization of the masses,
- v. Inauthentic living and absence of genuine communication,
- vi. Glorification of success rather than of service and achievement,
- vii. Acquiescence to authority, and
- viii. An unthinking respect for routine and status quo.

The educational policy for this decade of twenty first century must therefore be guided by principles that would address the trends and traditions listed above and help build 'critical consciousness' and 'creative vitality' in the culture of the people through the next century. These principles could be :

- i. Social cohesion
- ii. Individual human dignity
- iii. Freedom for and promotion of creative self expression, enquiry and innovation,
- iv. Simplicity and self-restraint, and
- v. Development, debate and distributive justice.

Accordingly, the objectives of education that would answer future challenges and help students grow in body, mind and spirit should be:

- i. Cultivation of skills and abilities to improve employability and self-employment.
- ii. Promotion of the study of science and technology to develop the spirit of enquiry, exploration, experimentation and analysis.
- iii. Inculcation of aesthetic sensibilities and moral values to enrich life and its pursuits, evolution of a comprehensive world view to enlarge vision expand outlook on life, and
- iv. Respect for all forms of life and expression, and faith in the creative genius of man.

These objectives of education necessitate a shift in emphasis and initiative in policy, planning and implementation, a shift from teaching to learning through self-learning to self-development. It will also demand corresponding change not only in the perception, interpretation and projection of the learning needs of the pupil but also in the mode of their satisfaction in the information-rich society of tomorrow, ironically replete with_

- i. A large scale pollution of air, water and food stuff,
- ii. Widespread scarcity of pure drinking water, fuel and foliage,
- iii. Cut-throat competition for survival and supremacy, and organized crime,
- iv. Consumerism and the sense of deprivation it breeds and grows on, and
- v. Loss of direction and purpose in life and a sense of unconcern for others.

The objectives of education listed above, had in varying degrees being visualized by various education commissions. However, they could not even partially be realized due to our understandable obsession with logic of numbers and the demands of a popular democracy. This does not, however, mean that India has made no progress. Far from it, our progress has been commendable in many fields including education and information. All the same, the exigencies of our situation forced us to serve reality rather than shape it. As a result, the emerging situation trends to be worse than ever before as it signifies our stoic indifference to general human welfare and symbioses shattered hopes and broken promises, with pollution permeating all walks of life-physical, cultural, intellectual and moral. The other non-material hazards we are likely to face are too many to be wished

away. Among them the foremost is the inertia borne of our excessive adulation the profundity of our philosophical thought and richness of culture, which has so, entered the Indian psyche that nothing easily stirs it to action. Our philosophical indifference to the attainable has been blurred our sense of difference between good and evil. Another hazard as disturbing as mental inertia and the inaction it has bred is the ambivalence of our attitude towards life and the choices it offers. Other hazards to be encountered are: a callous unconcern for the weak and disadvantaged and the hierarchical structure of our society and its tendency to kill questions and initiative.

We are entering the first decade of the twenty-first century impaired of both mind and spirit. Our only assets are the desire among the masses to acquire education and the knowledge we have inherited and accumulated. What we need is to recapture the spirit of enquiry and experimentation that gave us the concept of Zedoary Bhat, Charak Samhita and Sushrita Samhita and project the vision that thought of the whole world as one family (Vasudhav Kutumbakam) and prayed for the health, happiness and welfare of the whole of humankind (surve vawanthu sukkhinam...). In short, we have to strengthen further the tradition of science and technology we have already developed and promote a way of life that values self-restraint more than self-indulgence that finds simplicity more satisfying than self-projection and seeks happiness more in giving than in self-acquisition.

Ancient Indian thinkers perhaps had such a vision in mind when they conceived of education as emancipation, emancipation from all kind of want. To them emancipation meant the empowerment of the individual in order to help him satisfy the needs of the body (survival of life), the mind (celebration of life) and the spirit (sublimation of life) so that he or she grew in civilization and moved from mere physical existence to purposeful living.

Education as emancipation has greater relevance today than ever before; more so, as we are about to enter a phase of evolution in which human survival is under stress, if not threat. In such a situation empowerment of the new generation is obligatory to ensure their survival, sustain their living and make life a relaxed pursuit of human happiness. Educational thinking therefore will have to be geared to address the central problems to be drawn for the next century will need to focus on strategies needed to ensure satisfaction at all the three levels of living.

The success of a system of education depends not only on the quality of its plans and programmers but also on that of the support it gets from the people, on the level of the general awareness and public education-the tradition of non-formal education a society has-and the character and commitment of the people engaged in it. In future it will also depend on our ability and political will to make education the central point of the development process, use it as an instrument of reconstruction, reformation and reaffirmation; as a means to evolve a sane, sensible and non-exploitative way of life. This demands a convergence of all effort-social, economic, political, etc. to sub serve and support education, more so, as it alone can promote the need for better education, which will in turn demand more development and democracy.

Overhauling the contents of education and their transfer and assessment by rationalizing the syllabuses of teaching and examination system and their evaluation can make a banging in this direction.

The curricula of most Boards of Secondary Education are fairly elaborate in content and intent to satisfy some of our present needs. They only need the addition of community service and refinement of the Social Science/General Awareness Programme at the Secondary Level. The latter can be done by adding to the syllabus the critical study of:

- Religions, Ideologies and Knowledge Systems-Their relevance to present-day reality and its analysis,
- Nature of the Universe, the Human Mind and Human Language,
- Ecology, Environment, Population Growth and Resource Management
- Human Problems-their cause and implications, and
- Culture and civilization.

It should be an introductory course meant to relate learning to global issues and develop worldview, and be conducted through class discussions and debates. However, the areas that need radical reformation relate to teacher training, textbooks and materials production, and the examination system.

Teaching is the only profession that deals with growing minds, minds full of questions and curiosity, keen to find answers and quick to raise doubts and counter-questions. It deals with principles and processes that have universal value and not with finished products and marketable commodities. It relates to the empowerment and enrichment of the students personality, the formation of their character, conduct and vision. The three-needs of a growing mind, the process of learning and the empowerment and the enrichment of the individual – must determine the nature and organization of teacher training, textbook production and assessment and evaluation to ensure quality education. Accordingly, teaching must be a live, logical process, a meeting of minds and etching-learning as interaction, exploration and discovery; examination a means to assess rigorously knowledge, understanding, analysis, argument and application and textbooks as primitive of the teaching learning process and its evaluation. They must all contribute to self-learning, self-study and self-development; promote creative self-expression, critical thinking, comprehension, communication and independent judgment and help realize the objectives of education listed earlier.

To manage education means to manage minds and to manage minds to help release the energy held back in the Indian Psyche for want of opportunities for self-expression. It means to bring out all that is good and beautiful in humankind and use the energy to reshape life and make it a meaningful experience for all, irrespective of their birth and background. It involves the dissolution of disparities that have divided the people and fragmented society. It also involves the restoration of the spirit of assimilation and synthesis and the mosaic of life they have produced through cross-fertilization of ideas and cross-cultural contacts. It aims at the creation of a self-regulating, enlightened society that values general human welfare more than strident development and views the whole

humankind as one family with one future. This will be possible when we relate learning to life, to nature, to the rule-governed universe and introduce social economic and other reforms to ensure individual human dignity and restore the balance between man and man. Man and nature, and man, nature and God. This is possible only when we realize that man, nature and the rule-governed universe form an independent integrated, comprehensible whole and that the human mind has the capacity to grasp its fundamental unity, acquire knowledge about it and apply it to organize human life and its pursuits in such a way as to realize the vision of 'one World, one Future' and make life a fulfilling experience for the whole of humankind.