

EVALUATING THE IDEA OF EDUCATION IN COLONIAL INDIA: BRITISH AND INDIAN PERSPECTIVES

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Spiritual significance: Response of the physical mind to the supramental light.

Education always bears a positive connotation. It is imparted for the betterment of an individual and the society. A well educated person is said to be cultured and civilized and useful for humanity. 'Cultured' and 'civilized' are the terms over which the intelligentsia has been discussing and debating for ages. It is a tricky question. However, it is on the basis of this that the British tried to educate the Indians. They found the Indians uncultured and uncivilized and thought of uplifting them. The means to educate was through English Language and Literature. This change came after lot of debate and discussion among the British themselves as they had different opinions regarding the education of Indians. The controversy began with Charter act 1813 which had asked the East India Company to spend some amount on the education of Indians. The major issues which were raised regarding the usage of money for this education were – the class to which the education would be imparted; the language(s) that should be imparted; and the body which would be responsible to carry out this task.

The difference in ideologies regarding the language to be taught created two groups, namely the Orientalist and the Anglicists. The Orientalists advocated the study of indigenous literature through vernacular languages. They gave importance to Sanskrit and Arabic languages and thought that Indian culture can only be preserved in these. "According to the views of Munro, Indian

culture was of a higher order and as such England was to learn much from it" (Pani and Pattnaik: 12). However, the Anglicists emphasized that English was a better language and literature to be taught. Amidst this controversy, Lord Macaulay gave his historical 'Minute' in 1825. Macaulay related the education system with the benefit of trade and easy communication with the natives. According to him the minds could be only colonized with the Indian roots shaken. So he tried to uproot the Indian culture through English education. Despite being ignorant of the Indian languages he boldly made a statement in his 'Minute' — "single shelf of a good European literature was worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia" (Pani and Pattanaik: 13). He found English to be a language superior even to the other European languages. He advocated education for a selected class and wanted to create eminent clerks to serve the lower cadres in British administration. This 'Minute' passed by William Bentinck swept off the Indian system of education. It only aimed at producing "Brown Englishmen" with English thought and opinions.

Later, all the measures taken by Charles Wood in his Despatch (1854) and Hunter's commission only aimed at building or expanding Colleges or Universities all over India. They then moved to the school education as well. However, the basic tenets of education were taken from the Minute itself. It was for the benefit of the British governance that the clerks learnt English language and English literature. The education system of the British which started as movement of learning with Munro became a means of dominance, a means of colonization. Essentially, the British education almost killed the nationalist feeling, it wiped off the faith of Indians in their own culture; it even did away with the belief in the Indian classical and vernacular languages and changed the basic philosophy of life of the Indian people against the Indian temperament.

With this commotion and these changes in the Indian education system, there came up a class of elites who studied the Indian and the British literature and knew Indian classical, vernacular, English and other European languages. They were well-versed with the Indian and European cultures. They realized the motives of British education and brought out in their own respective ways solutions or ways to take Indians back to their roots. Raja Ram Mohan Roy established the Brahmo Samaj to spread education among masses in India. He advocated the study of sciences brought in by British, for they were scientific and could rid India of the superstitions and rigid traditions. However, he encouraged the study of Indian scriptures, Sanskrit and vernacular languages, and emphasized the aim of education to self-reliance and scientific enquiry. Later Keshab Chandra Sen, Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar, Swami Dayananda Saraswati took the flame of education forward. This was further carried forth by Swami Vivekananda, Rabindranath Tagore, Sri Aurobindo, Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Mahatma Gandhi and others. All these stalwarts understood the importance of education and framed their own ideologies of education which was implemented differently in different parts of India under their

respective suitable conditions. Essentially they talked about the importance of the nationalist education; an education which is indigenous in essence; which advocates the growth of mind, body and soul; which fetches livelihood to the individual.

There was some resistance among Indians regarding the British rule in India. When these stalwarts came to the forefront, India was already struggling with the foreign rule. Education thus became a means to awaken the national spirit. Freedom of India was the primary motive of these leaders then. To bring about this, there had to be a nationalist will and fervor which was lacking. National education was the major agenda, however, it had different connotations for different people. For Swami Vivekananda it was the self-mastery through concentration, dedication and efforts and to become a human being which can help other citizens to support themselves. To quote Pani and Pattnaik, "Vivekananda wanted this type of all-round education which in no way can be considered poor, because it is replete with national feeling and sentiments, aims to development of heart and mind, strengthen character and national consciousness, help in the cultivation of strength and energy, nurture the brain and intellect and finally stir feelings of kindness and sympathy" (59). Swami Vivekananda emphatically said—"The ideal of all education, all training should be man-making... what we want are western science coupled with Vedanta... education is the manifestation of the perfection already in man. I look upon religion as the innermost core of education. [And this education] must be on the national lines..." (quoted in Pani and Pattnaik : 69)

The idea of education given by the stalwarts is intimately related to their philosophies. Gandhi's emphasis on 'truth' and 'non-violence' helped him formulate the education system which essentially advocates character building. He also emphasized an education which provides livelihood and self-sufficiency. While he defined Swaraj, he said "Swaraj for me means freedom for the meanest of our countrymen... I am not interested in freeing India merely from the English yoke whatsoever" (Pani and Pattnaik: 171). He stressed the capacity of an individual to rule himself. Tilak, on the other hand, brought in the idea of National pride with national education. Through mass festivals he sent a message about the cultural heritage of India and the importance of sacrifices done by the ancestors especially Shivaji. He was an extremist who fought for India's struggle with pride in his national heritage. They all wanted a home rule and struggled in their own ways for the same. However, it is in Sri Aurobindo's thought that the widest definition of Nationalism and national education may be found. "Nationalism is not a mere political programme; Nationalism is a religion that has come from God; Nationalism is a creed in which you shall have to live." (Sri Aurobindo, Vol 7: 818). National education in Sri Aurobindo's view is intimately related to Home Rule. He said, "We want not only a free India, but a great India, India taking worthily the place among the Nations and giving to the life of humanity what she alone can give."

(Sri Aurobindo, Vol 1: 412) He added further, "Individual interest and National interest are the same and call in the same direction." (412). Sri Aurobindo believed that Nation is not a mere piece of land. It is a living soul, a living entity and India's freedom is a work of God for a larger humanity which may be brought about by National Education.

Swami Vivekananda, Sri Aurobindo, Tagore, Tilak and Gandhi all made efforts to bring back the lost faith of Indians in its culture and scriptures. For this they advocated the study of Indian languages and literature.

We must grow according to our nature. Vain is to attempt the lines of action that foreign societies have engrafted upon us; it is impossible. Glory unto God that is impossible, that we cannot be twisted and tortured into the shape of other nations. I do not condemn the institutions, and other traditions behind them, they have got their present system. We, with our traditions with thousands of years of karma behind us, naturally can only follow our bent; run in our grooves, and that we shall have to do. (*Pani and Pattanik: 54*)

Tagore, Tilak and Gandhi also advocated the amalgamation of Indian and European language and Literature. However, more emphasis was given to the former. Inculcating faith in Indian scriptures and languages was a major line of action to bring in National Education and resist the ways of British domination. This is the way Sri Aurobindo highlighted the importance of India in his journal *Bande Mataram*:

So with India rests the future of the world. Whenever she is aroused from her sleep, she gives forth some wonderful shining ray of light to the world which is enough to illuminate the nations. Others live for centuries on what is to her the thought of a moment. God gave her the book of Ancient Wisdom and bade her keep it sealed in her heart, until the time should come for it is to be opened. Sometimes a page or a chapter is revealed, sometimes only a single sentence. Such sentences have been the inspiration of ages and fed humanity for many hundreds of years. So too when India sleeps, materialism grows apace and the light is covered up in darkness. But when materialism thinks herself about to triumph, lo and behold! A light rushes out from the East and where is materialism? Returned to her native night. (890)

Women were seen as major instruments of change in the society. She is seen as being capable of moulding her children and encouraging men folk with her strength. Indeed down the centuries her position has deteriorated but the revival in India has brought hope for her. All the educationists and leaders mentioned above have laid emphasis on educating women. Subramaniam Bharti started this with educating his wife and daughters and made them self dependent. All the reform movements strived to liberate women from the shackles of

ignorance and convention. Sri Aurobindo went a step further and brought back the ancient Indian view of woman as Shakti, as the dynamic force. He believed that education of an individual starts in the womb itself. The Puranic story of the birth of Prahlad and in Mahabharata, Abhimanyu's knowledge of the Chakravayuh which he learnt while in the womb are examples of this fact. Therefore, the awareness of women about her potentials and capabilities was given great importance.

All have talked about the education for mind, body and soul. It is important to note that the European system of education made learning a mechanical process. Stuffing data in the mind and memorizing formulae by heart was all they could teach. There was no creativity on the part of teachers, neither was it encouraged in the students. A larger and more comprehensive system was encouraged by the Indian elites which had the best of both East and West; the rigour of the West and the depth of the East. Swami Vivekananda advocated the training of the mind through concentration and Hatha Yogic kinds of practices. He remarked—"Getting by heart the thought of others in a foreign language and stuffing your brain with them and taking some university degrees, you consider yourself educated. Is this education? (Pani and Pattnaik: 59). Rabindranath Tagore emphasized on aesthetic education. Shantiniketan was an example where he made arrangements for such an education. He believed in developing an individual's sensibility through his contact with nature. He thus, gave freedom to the students to express themselves through arts, poetry and varied ways of expression. All gave ways to train the mind and body. Sri Aurobindo gave importance to the overall growth of human personality. For this he used the terms physical, vital, mental and spiritual education. In his writings on "National Education" and the "Brain of India" he elaborately dealt with all these. He gave equal importance to the education of all the levels of being mentioned above. Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education in Pondicherry is an example where these ideals are practiced. Essentially, he emphasized training the different parts of being to be able to become the perfect instruments for the Divine Work. It is important that body, the vital and mind are ready when "the hour of God" comes. Like Swami Vivekananda he also believed that nothing can be taught; that knowledge is inherent in every human being. It is through proper education and training that the veils of ignorance have to be lifted. While keeping in view spiritual education, Sri Aurobindo did not ignore the importance of training the senses, building character and working on morals. All these form the part of mental and vital training. The motive of education is to merge one's will with the God's will and to understand God's will one has to undergo rigorous training. This training is given by teachers and facilitators who facilitate the seeker to look within and bring out the hidden potentials.

There has been a marked difference in the approach of the British and Indian ways of looking at education. The British did not take into consideration the innate swabhav of the individual. Whereas in India since ancient times,

swabhav has been an essential factor which determined the mode and the subject of education. Education was always given according to the temperament and bent of the individuals. Critical thinking, logical reasoning, character building, love for one's nation and humanity and service to God all formed an integral part of education. Although it was lost, it was Sri Aurobindo who revived it in its fullness and gave his system the name—integral education; education for the entire personality and the education which integrates the personality. Indians advocated learning the best of the East and the West, whereas, in order to dominate and prove their cultural superiority, the British degraded Indian culture before Indians and established the supremacy of their culture through education.

This is how the idea of education as an uplifting force itself took different shapes in the hands of British and Indian educationists. There is no denial of the fact that education is for the betterment of life and it is supposed to bring about a positive change in the lives of educated as well uneducated men. The difference lies in the swabhava of the people to which it is given. It also depends upon the philosophical heritage that a nation has nurtured since past ages. The Indian philosophical heritage had always been on the spiritual grounds. For ages India has been practicing the education system which caters to the mind, body and soul of the individual. Indeed it got deformed and deteriorated under the burden of customs, conventions and traditions, so there was a need to revive the roots of ancient education and amalgamate it with the new advancements in education taken from the developments from all over the world.

Looking at the present scenario, it cannot be said that the present education system has inculcated this discovery and amalgamation, however attempts are being made. Experiments and researches in the field of education are conducted and the educationists, teachers and parents are trying to find an education system which incorporates the old and the new, the real and the ideal.

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