

Concept of Education as Presented in Prabuddha Bharata

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PRABUDDHA BHARATA, an esteemed magazine started by Swami Vivekananda, has played a significant role in reconstructing the society by offering noble ideas. The concepts covered by the magazine on religion, philosophy, education, Vedanta, culture, and the like are noteworthy. *Prabuddha Bharata* published its first article on education in 1904. Since then, the journal has published many scholarly articles on the meaning, scope, and objectives of education and also on the educational philosophies of different scholars.

Education is Not Merely for Breadwinning

In the present-day society, we observe that education has become a means for breadwinning, achieving social status, and earning money, which is unfortunate. The term 'education' comes from a Latin word '*educare*' which means 'to bring forth'. However, at the present time, we have indeed moved away from what education truly is or what education should be. As a result, we now face numerous problems both at the individual as well as social levels. There is no denying the fact that increasing literacy, which we have equated with education today, has not necessarily resulted in a decrease in crimes. On

one hand, we have had rapid improvements in literacy and material conveniences for daily life, thanks to modern technology. But at the same time, we also witness an equally rapid decline in social values and an increase in turbulence among the individuals.

A renowned scholar and educationist, Prof. T M P Mahadevan points out in the article 'The Philosophy of Education' (*PB*, August 1952): 'A major flaw in our present education is that it contributes very little to the flowering of an integrated personality. Learning a number of subjects with an eye on passing an examination is almost the whole of education as we know it.'¹ In the olden days, education was sought for the wholesome training of the personality, so as to understand the truth of life and realise the supreme knowledge for eternal freedom and absolute bliss. But as we all know, our present education system has been reduced to be merely a means of getting jobs.

Recently, there was an advertisement in a newspaper noting the need for engineers with a starting salary of ₹8000/-. But the same company had also mentioned that they need carpenters, plumbers, and masons with the starting salary of ₹25,000/-. Though we cannot generalise this, it is a fact in many instances. The founder president of the Indian Medical Association, Thrissur, Dr A R Poduval in his article 'The Realities of Modern Education' (*PB*, March 1935) discusses this problem. He says that with our modern

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education system, the problem of unemployment has increased. Almost every educated person desires to have a government job, but hardly a few succeed in getting it. The intention of most of the job-seekers to get an easy-going secure job has resulted in a serious unemployment problem. The author points out how a farmer's son wants to be an officer, an artisan's son wants to be a government employee, and so on. Due to this, there is an unhealthy competition and as a result, many arts and skills of the older generations are dying out.

If we take the case of a goldsmith, or a carpenter, or a mason, or a potter, or any such class of artisans, we find that the glamour of a Government job has blinded them. Also instead of teaching their sons improved methods of their original craft, they make hectic efforts to procure for them such jobs as a clerkship, a police-constable, or even a petty peon in an office. Within a generation or two, the craft of the artisan would become extinct. There are no Government jobs for the succeeding generations of these hand-craftsmen, and having by this time, practically divorced themselves from their hereditary trades, they are let out to float in the world, among the mass of floatage of the unemployed.²

While discussing the problems of modern education, Dr Poduval shares the predicament of a farmer:

There are in that building, two of my children, soft-handed and educated. There is no job for either of them. They are not wanted in any Department. The boy has adopted the usual 'Style' of the educated folk, and does not know the difference between a bullock and a buffalo. The girl is a bit costlier in her costumes, and has not learnt the use of a broom-stick. In a year or two, I shall be too old to do any work. We are too poor to engage workmen on any scale. And my educated children have learnt to take a distinct dislike to such manual labour as agriculture demands (146).

While mentioning the drawbacks of the modern education system, Swamiji remarked: 'Goodness gracious! What a fuss and fury about graduating, and after a few days all cooled down! ... At last, they cannot keep the wolf from the door! What does it matter whether this higher education remains or goes? It would be better if the people got a little technical education so that they may find work and earn their bread instead of dawdling about and crying for service.'³

Dr Poduval also mentions that the present education system has become a costly affair. However, we cannot deny that the modern education has many positive sides also.

What is Education?

The meaning and facets of education are well discussed in an article 'Ideals of Education' published in June 1912 by an anonymous author. Here the author analyses education from the Vedantic point of view. Education is derived from the Latin word and its meaning is 'to draw out' or 'to draw forth'. The author opines that education is a process and not an end in itself. It is a process by which something is drawn out. That something is 'our true individuality'. So, education should help a human being to know her or his real nature. Here we may remember that Swamiji defined education on similar lines: 'Education is the manifestation of the perfection which is already in man' (4.358).

The author also discusses the *subject matter* of education. Basically, there are two types of knowledge: one is secular and the other is spiritual.



Dr A R Poduval (1884–1940)



Swami Vireshwarananda (1892–1985)

Secular knowledge is about the empirical world, while spiritual knowledge is about our intrinsic nature. The author lays bare an effective comparison between these two aspects of education:

The one is open to doubt and readjustment; the other is a state of awareness, a state of conviction in feeling. The one is fixed in the realm of probability—for theories and even established laws are subject to the changes that occur in the wake of increasing discovery; the other is fixed in the realm of changeless spiritual actuality. The one is busy with the definition of matter; the other is busy with the realisation of the spiritual foundation of consciousness. The one is physical, the other spiritual. The one deals with the discovery of physical facts; the other deals with the realisation of spiritual realities. The one is subject to change; the other is established in the domain of infallible reality. The one deals with the revelation of parts, the other with the revelation of the Unit Whole.⁴

In the article ‘Some Views on Education’ (PB June 1921), Swami Vireshwarananda dwells on education according to Swami Vivekananda. He makes an interesting point that education is ‘...preparation for life. With the ancient Hindus, it was not only a preparation for this life but also for the life to come.’⁵ He also notes that education in ancient India was complete in itself. It gave importance to both secular and spiritual aspects of life. Modern education, on the other hand, gives importance only to the former, while completely neglecting the latter. That is one of the biggest drawbacks of present education, due to which we are facing several problems both in individual level as well as collective level. The author also makes an interesting observation that modern people state that the ancient education system gave importance to spiritual knowledge and neglected the secular part. But this is far from reality. Our ancient education system gave equal importance to both and hence in ancient times, there was a great development in the material sciences too. However, due to the continuous invasions from outside forces, our progress was hampered and we lost many of our accomplishments.

Even from the oldest Upanishads we learn that the students were taught various other branches of knowledge also. From the conversation between Narada and Sanatkumara in the Chhandogya Upanishad we find that mathematics, politics, astronomy, logic, science, fine arts etc. formed parts of the curriculum. The Hindus had made great progress in all these subjects. But unfortunately owing to unfavourable historical circumstances the progress of the nation was arrested and no more development was made in these sciences (ibid.).

Sir Brajendranath Seal (‘Indian Education, Past and Future’, PB, October 1926), while articulating his views on education, makes a

notable point that Indian education system had several unique features. The students had to take three vows during their education, namely, *the vow of chastity, the vow of poverty, and the vow of labour*. The vow of chastity was useful in controlling the mind and its instincts. It checked the students' mind from impurities and craving for luxuries. It also made the student practice *rita*, the truth. The vow of poverty disciplined the young mind and trained it to lead a simple life. The pupil would be free from covetousness and luxuries, and hence the mind would become ready to receive the knowledge imparted by one's teacher. With such disciplines of character-building, the student's mind would not be distracted but concentrated on learning various subjects. So, in the ancient Gurukula system, in approximately 13 to 15 years, the student was able to study many subjects. Simple living and high thinking were the goals of every student in the Gurukula. The vow of labour prepared students to be independent and trained them to recognise the dignity of labour. Due to this, maintenance of the Gurukula also became easy due to the fact that a strong bond of mutual trust was created between the students and their teachers.

The ancient education system prepared an individual at the physical, mental, ethical, and spiritual levels. It transformed a student into a responsible citizen of the motherland by imparting country's culture and traditions which have come down from generations. The education was free and each teacher took the individual responsibility of every student, something which is unique in a Gurukula system. Mr Seal argues that after repeated invasions, though our education system had dwindled, there was still a notable percentage of students in the Indian traditional schools. He gives a statistic that though for a hundred years there was a planned destruction of our ancient education system,



Sir Brajendranath Seal (1864–1938)

around thirty percent of boys were enrolled in the traditional schools in 1815.

Also our ancient system was in no way inferior to the modern education system, nay, it was even better. Brajendranath Seal clarifies:

The [Indian] Astronomy and Mathematics were not less advanced than those of Tycho Brahe, Cardan and Fermat; the Anatomy was equal to that of Vesalius, the Hindu Logic and Methodology more advanced than that of Ramus, and equal to Bacon's; the physico-chemical speculations on combustion, heat, chemical affinity, clearer, more rational, and more original than those of Van Helmont of Stahl; and the Grammar, whether of Sanskrit or Prakrit, or of the Semitic tongues, the most scientific and comprehensive in the world before Bopp, Rask and Grimm.⁶

Brajendranath Seal refutes the idea that our ancient education system focused only on individual liberation. He points out how it also tried to teach social ethics. In every student,



T. M. P. Mahadevan (1911–1983)

our ancient education instilled *a universal approach* which called one to pray for the well-being of others and of every creature in the fourteen worlds—*Lokā samasthā sukhino bhavantu*, a teaching that taught the students to feel oneness with every creature on this earth.

Salient Features of Our Ancient Education System

The noted Indian historian and nationalist, Dr Radha Kumud Mukherjee discusses the salient features of Indian ancient education system in his article that appeared in the *Prabuddha Bharata* in March 1934, titled 'Ideals of Ancient Hindu Education'. He points out how ancient Indian education system was better than the modern education system. The main reason being that the Gurukula system was the outcome of a system of life, whereas the present education system is like a factory manufacturing a single product on a large scale. The Gurukula system gave personal attention to each student and it helped every individual to grow. In contrast, the present system has failed to understand that *every individual is unique by nature*, and hence, this mass educational system will not work. To make it more clear, the author gives an example of a hospital where every patient is diagnosed and gets treatment according to her or his disease:

Modern Universities are like factories providing for mass production in education, turning out standardized products mostly devoid of any special genius. Such a system is based on a radical error which ignores the natural

differences of individuals and artificially and mechanically forces them into a class for purposes of a uniform treatment. The absurdity of this position may be understood if a uniform treatment is meted out to patients in a hospital irrespective of differences of their diseases and their remedies.⁷

The author also gives the example of Nalanda University and explains that the education taught there was not just for a livelihood, rather it was intended for pursuit of truth.

Drawbacks of Our Present Education System

T. M. P. Mahadevan ('The Philosophy of Education', *PB*, August 1952) remarks that our present education system has been narrowed down to bread-winning and has neglected the building of a personality or character. So, there is a substantial increase in literacy rate all over the world with an increase in social evils too. That is because, 'A major flaw in our present education is that it contributes very little to the flowering of an integrated personality. Learning a number of subjects with an eye on passing an examination is almost the whole of education as we know it.'⁸

One of the major drawbacks of our present education system is its foreign nature. *Every education system should be based on one's own culture.* The present education system in India, however, was developed by British and after making negligible corrections, we are still following it. As a result, Indians are moving away from their indigenous culture. Sri Mahadevan writes:

The present-day education in India has no basis in the indigenous culture; those who receive the modern education in India become, usually, foreign in outlook and thought, and they become misfits to the society and family they come from.⁹

Naturally, the question arises in our mind as to what education really is or how it should be imparted to the students. The answer is, education, in general, is the assimilation of knowledge through focussed study leading to competence in one's chosen area, greater self-belief, and stronger moral values. But of late, this broader approach has been replaced by one where education entirely has become a means to the attainment of power, wealth, and comfort, which is unfortunate. The author says:

The equipment, the efficiency, or the preparation for life has been understood by ninety per cent of people as putting one on the way of making a living in life. Again, the making of a living in life involves a selfish view of one's own aggrandizement in place of a wider outlook which ought to be the aim of true education. According to this view, the individual is shaped and moulded to fit him into some business by means of which he may acquire money, position, and power in life. Therefore, when the question of educating a person is under consideration, the man-making factor is overlooked.¹⁰

Instead, just one aspect of education, namely, 'literacy' is equated with the whole of education. As an indication of this accepted perception, the Merriam Webster dictionary defines education as 'the field of study that deals mainly with methods of teaching and learning in schools'. Another dictionary states that being 'educated' is the gaining of competence in a specific field of study in an educational institution. It would not be an exaggeration to say that it is this narrow approach of seeing 'education' solely as 'academic/literary competence' that has led to many of the problems seen in today's society.

There is also another danger. A purely utilitarian view of education, which is the main reason for the present popularity of subjects like science and economics, is neither a healthy nor

a desirable view. The object of education is not to produce mere technicians and wage-earners. There is a higher purpose that education should never lose sight of.

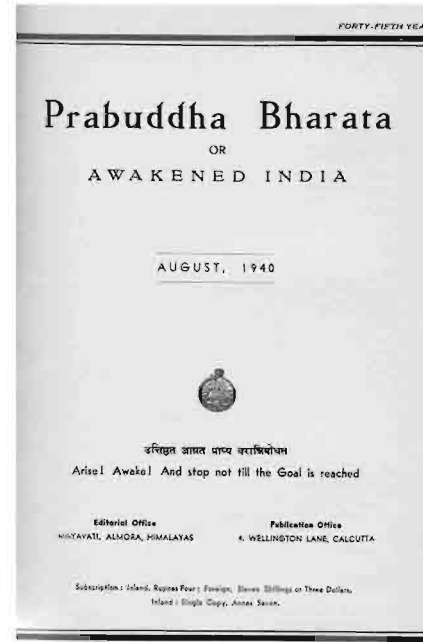
Complete Education

Prof. S Sivaraman, while discussing his ideas on education in his article 'Education for Building a Greater World' (PB, August 1940), defines education as

a 'preparation for complete living'. He opines that the complete living includes physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual aspects of life. So, education should equip a student to enrich himself in all these realms. He says that the Western education system has given importance to physical and mental sides and neglected the ethical and spiritual sides. As a result, there is an excitement in social life, unhealthy competition in economic life, and short-sighted egoism in politics. Hence, the consequences in physical, mental, and ethical realms of life are far from satisfactory.

The East has always laid emphasis on the spiritual side of the life not neglecting other aspects. According to S Sivaraman, complete education, for the better world, lies in,

the re-building of a greater world, where the body should be developed to its fullest health and strength, the mind should be trained to think clearly and originally, the emotions



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should be directed towards the love of the beauty which delights through an ideal and the good which enriches the harmony between the self and the not-self; and the spirit should shine forth in the outer world through harmonious thought, word, and action. Then this world will be a heaven where men and women struggle not for the narrow satisfaction of desires, which aim at aggrandisement in externals and toil, not in weariness and strife, but where men and women realize an ever-growing happiness and peace through clear thought, ideal art, abidingly delightful emotion, and wisely planned action yielding harmony.¹¹

Education in Ramakrishna Mission schools

In an article on 'Ideals in Education' (*PB* June 1929), the author (anonymous), a former student of one of the schools run by Ramakrishna Mission, says that 'it is a home before it is a school'. He points out that generally in outside schools, academics play an important role and hostels attached to these have an insignificant role in the education process. But in Ramakrishna Mission schools, it is quite the opposite. He says:

In other educational institutions in our country, the school properly as it is called, plays the more important part, and hostels, if there are any, attached to the school, have very little influence on the collective life of the school. Schools are started first and hostels are added afterwards. This seems the natural order. But in our school the growth has been in the reverse way and it is not by accident.¹²

He also says that it is the ancient Gurukula system that is followed in Ramakrishna Mission schools. Here they try to build or create 'an ideal home' rather than set up a place for mere instruction and examination. This is not merely a place for students to learn what they did not know, rather it is a workshop 'where they learn

to behave as they did not behave in the past.' It is an institution meant for building the character of every student. The salient feature of a Ramakrishna Mission school is that here the son of a farmer, the son of a businessman, or the son of a wealthy person—all live together and no distinction is made among them. Here students are trained to learn every aspect of work, which enables them to be independent in their lives and respect the dignity of labour.

What education is and what education should be can best be understood in Swamiji's words: 'We want that education by which character is formed, strength of mind is increased, the intellect is expanded and *by which one can stand on one's own feet*.'¹³



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