

ST. CHAVARA'S PERSPECTIVE ON CHARACTER EDUCATION AND ITS IMPLEMENTATION IN SCHOOLS- A QUALITATIVE STUDY

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ABSTRACT

Character education is a topic of renewed interest for educationalists and institutions due to increased value deterioration found in different parts of the world. St. Chavara lived in nineteenth century which was a caste ridden and socially unjust society. The best medicine he found out for its cure was an education rooted in moral and spiritual values. According to him character education has to be initiated in the family; and has to be continued through the school by family – school collaboration. Keeping the educational ideals of St. Chavara his followers are actively involved in educational mission at different parts India and abroad. Present study explores value education experiences of fifty teachers from different parts of India, through semi structured interviews and focus group discussions. Thematic analysis is employed to find emerging codes and themes. The factors which facilitate value education and character formation are identified and their implications are briefed.

Keywords: Character education, spiritual life, parental collaboration, psychological approach, integrated approach, social action, modelling, counselling and guidance

1. INTRODUCTION

St. Chavara was born in Kerala, on 10th February, 1805. He was an innovative educationist and social reformer of 19th century in Kerala. Having perceived the role of education for the development of a society, he introduced different educational and reformation programmes which laid foundation for a just and equitable society in Kerala at that time. The education envisaged by St. Chavara was a perfect blend of intellectual, practical, and spiritual (moral) formation (Kuriedathu, 2013). He aimed at the growth of the individual from the narrow boundary of self, and doing good for the society.

Character education is a process of facilitating students' character and behaviour as per universal values and culturally accepted norms. Different schools use the term as Value

education, Moral education, and Moral science etc. in different places. The very nature of character education indicates empowering the students with certain attitudes and skills as well as giving them the critical ability to use them in the contemporary everyday world, full of myriad challenges (NCERT). As per the UNESCO perspective reorientation of education to create a better world is an urgent need of the time. A long age-old heritage of value education promoted spirituality and produced great thinkers, philosophers and spiritual leaders in India. Love for nature and preservation of environment are also held high by Gandhiji and Tagore. The importance of spiritual values is believed great by from olden times, but the same stress is not found in the present educational policies and plans. Satya Sai, Aurobindo, Krishnamurthy etc. propose the importance of Spiritual education. According to Sri Satya Sai, without spiritual education human life has little value. He compares secular and religious education as two wings which enable people to soar high. He exhorts to students to be good; to see good and to do good, (Sai) which resembles Chavara concept.

In the process of changes in education, as per the demands of the shifting scenario, many transformations are included in school curriculum for the skill development, personality growth and holistic assessment; but the thrust for character formation is often found less. There are schools and colleges which give due importance for value education and character formation. Still it cannot be ascertained that real value education or character formation is taking place in the life of students in this media dominated and media directed multicultural society. So this study is an attempt to identify the Chavara concepts of value education from the literature, and also to discover experiences of teacher's regarding value education and character formation practices in the select private schools owned by the followers of St. Chavara.

1.1. Objectives of the Study

To identify the concepts of Character education in schools according to St. Chavara

To identify the factors facilitate the character education practices in the select schools

1.2. Statement of the Problem

This research proposes to discover concepts of character education with regard to St. Chavara's vision; to analyse the teacher's experience of value education practices in the select private schools and to relate research findings with teacher education context of India

1.3. Methodology

The present study has two parts. The first one is a historical analysis using primary sources of St. Chavara and the secondary sources on St. Chavara, to explore vision of St. Chavara. And the second part is a qualitative study based on teachers' experience in schools, selected on theoretical basis, from North, South, East, West and central parts of India, where two congregations founded by St. Chavara (Congregations of Mother of Carmel and Carmelites of Mary Immaculate) are actively involved in the mission of education. Semi structured interview is used for data collection and thematic analysis is employed for analysis using NVivo.

2. CHARACTER EDUCATION – ST. CHAVARA'S PERSPECTIVE

As per the mind of St. Chavara, a lot of good had been missing to the society due to the want of a band of spiritually committed persons (C K C I). So St. Chavara and his companions wanted to make it fertile with abundant fruits in all fields of life through their good works. "It is in selecting the kind of 'good works' and the manner of doing them, we discover the unique kind of creativity or innovativeness in them, particularly in St. Chavara" (Kuriedath, 2015). All the creative work he had done for the betterment of the society was the extension of this vision. To Chavara, educational institutions are accountable to hand over the spiritual, moral and social values and thus he instructs his followers.

2.1. Character Education - Rooted in Spiritual Life

As in the case of many Indian educators and spiritual scholars, Chavara too had a traditional understanding of values education which is very much associated with spiritual education. St. Chavara's entire activities are originated from a divine vision. The verses from 'Atmanutapam- Compunction of a soul' (his poetical work- CWC II) shed profound light into the theological and anthropological vision of St. Chavara regarding human beings. For him all are children of God irrespective of caste, creed or gender. This is the basis of his triple relationship; ie. with (i) the Supreme, (ii) fellow beings and (iii) the world around. For him every person and the Universe are reflections of God. So he cannot live in this world in isolation, but can exist only in mutual relation, and hence the very gift of his life is totally set apart to foster this triple relationship. This love relationship with God and fellow being transformed him an engine of activity aiming at enriching the society with good works (Venkataraman, 2004). J. Kuriedath rightly points out the fact:

God has endowed all human beings with a spark of his own nature, the divinity... As the human beings are endowed with the divine spark, they are gifted with the charisma to re-create the world. We notice the manifestation of the human creativity in all spheres of our life – science, art, literature, culture, and also spirituality”... Chavara reformed and reconstructed the Kerala society, but chiefly through spiritual empowerment, which he garnered for himself and for the society through his constant and intimate relationship with God, and the channeling of the same into the various socio-cultural needs. For him, his pioneering steps were not merely for social reconstruction, but more importantly for the building of a society that can be truly called the kingdom of God. (Kuriyath, 2015)

St. Chavara’s very life and activities affirm that his ultimate aim in this world was nothing but to enhance it and make it a better place for others to live.

2.2. Parental Collaboration

A solid association between schools and parents produce constructive benefits to pupils, and is highly important for social cohesion in schools and the wider community (Rosenberg & Lopez, 2011; Rosenberg, 2012). Past researches show that parents' participation in education has been a topic of considerable interest and concern only over the past 25 years; family–school partnerships were the exception, rather than the norm, before 1980s (Jinnah & Walters, 2009). Though increased thrust on parental involvement is a recent concern in the educational milieu, Chavara’s testament to families (CWC/IV/ix/6, 1868) contains his ideas and expectations of parental support and family role in the education of their children.

In “The Testament of a Loving Father” (CWC/IV/ix/6, 1868), he teaches families concerning the transfer of values to the generations. The very definition of family includes various factors. To him Family is similar to heaven built by a community of people joined together by a bond of blood and love, manifesting respect and obedience to elders; and walk in peace with the Lord and the people. (CWC/IV/ix/6, 1868) He considers children as divine treasures entrusted to the families so it is the responsibility of parents to educate and equip with virtues and return them to God. These concepts clarify most important values that are to be transferred to children through families. His testament holds high the values of prayer and spiritual exercises, mutual love, respect and forgiveness in the family, responsible freedom, education of children, need of good books of wisdom, gentle corrections and meaningful punishments which promotes psychological growth, moderate detachment and responsible use of wealth and earthly possessions, practice of social justice and social

commitment (CWC/IV/ix/6, 1868). He encouraged reading of good books and asked parents to collect good books at home. The collaboration between parents and teachers that Chavara visualized is, ideally speaking, the best suited module for effective learning and social upbringing of children (Chackalackal, 2013).

2.3. Psychological Approach

Discipline is a term very much associated with character education. Discipline corrects moulds and strengthens mental faculties and moral character. To spare the rod, spoils the child was the acceptable norm in the field of education till 1977, when corporal punishment became legal concern as per US Supreme court. Even now in 2015, corporal punishment is a part of educational discipline in several parts of India. But in 1868 in the directions regarding the good bringing up of children St. Chavara, like a well learned psychologist instructed on gentle corrections with love, nobility of all works and psychological wellbeing of children. He wrote:

Do not be very stiff or very lenient towards your children... Excessive stiffness, anger and punishment will make them desperate, dejected and even unashamed. Work, as becomes your status of life. It is not suitable for a noble man to refuse to work. Do not engage in unbecoming conversations and gossips in the presence of your little children, thinking that they are too young to understand what you say, thinking that they are too young to understand what you say. (CWC/IV/ix/6, 1868)

As a visionary educationist, he inspires educationists of two centuries and the centuries to come with his innovative and pragmatic philosophy of education and contributions which catalysed the reconstruction of Kerala society.

2.4. Influence of peers and media

St. Chavara's instruction to families elucidates that he was very well aware of the influence of friends and media. So he advised parents to be careful about the friendship of their wards and to enquire during the visits to school regarding their behaviour and friendship. According to him bad books are like fire in the dried straw (CWC/IV/ix/6, 1868). To yield good books, he became an author of books and established the first indigenous printing press in Kerala (Rajasekharan, 2015), thinking it will produce many good books which will guide the society in the path of good.

3. CHARACTER EDUCATION - TEACHERS' EXPERIENCE

Value education is an urgent need of the day and as responsible parents, teachers, students and social workers all must join the movement, exhorts Jindal (2013). Children can be motivated both by internal and external factors. Teachers should develop a true love and affection for children which will motivate children to be excellent in all fields (Sekhar and Emmaniel, 2012).

3.1. Result and Discussion

St. Chavara's one and a half centuries ago vision is also in tune with the recent finding related to teacher's role in imparting value education. So the researcher has selected ten schools and fifty teachers for her study on the implementation of Chavara vision of character education.

Table: 1

| Area/Region | CMI School | | CMC School | |
|---------------|------------|--------------|------------|--------------|
| | No. School | No. Teachers | No. School | No. Teachers |
| South India | 1 Sr. Sec | 5 | 1 Sr. Sec | 5 |
| North India | 1 Sr. Sec | 5 | 1 Sec. | 5 |
| East India | 1 Sr. Sec | 5 | 1 Sr. Sec | 5 |
| West India | 1 Sr. Sec | 5 | 1 Sr. Sec | 5 |
| Central India | 1 Sr. Sec | 5 | 1 Sr. Sec | 5 |

All the teachers were asked to share their experience of imparting value education to students in their schools. As a part of their sharing they included the various programmes of the school, what individual teachers do for the purpose, how they incorporate value education with their subject teaching, what are the challenges they face etc. The findings are briefed as follows.

3.2.1. Value Education Classes

Irrespective of the region all teachers shared that they have separate value education programmes based on a selected book till class 9th. They found a book helpful as they contain lessons and stories related moral, spiritual, social and civic values (5050). Out of ten schools, in five schools there is special periods for value education for all the classes 1-12, but one school has no special book for value education for classes 10-12; in this school principal gives

them two classes per month. Four other (4/10) schools do not have special books and special periods for value education in classes from 10-12. In all the schools there is value education assessment using internal examination, and grade is allotted except in one school. One school has mark system; but kept in separate columns. According to them without marks students will not study seriously.

46/50 teachers from the select ten schools found it meaningful to teach value education. As per the view of 2/50 interviewees, values cannot be imparted to any one, so they try to live and show example to others, they said. They believe only in role modelling, not in teaching by books or by words. 2/50 shared that value can be taught by families and parents better, not by teachers and school. Still they teach in the school, as decided by the institution, not by their interest. As per the experience of forty teachers (40/50), they explain the value education lessons through life examples and with other stories and experiences. 8/50 finds lack of time for extra explanations; and 2/50 explains that students are not interested in moral science classes. 45/50 teachers shared that students sit in moral science classes due to school rule, and for grade in the report card; and not for life. 5/50 shared joyously that they enjoy teaching moral science classes, and children are also very interested as they teach through different activities and also using smart board. 1/50 shared that students are eagerly waiting for his moral education class. 3/50 told that they give children regularly some occasions for practising values they studied in value education class. They ask in the next class to share students' experiences. Most of the students take seriously such practices, they shared. Children are competing to do good to others, to help anyone in the class, help their parents etc. was the experience of these three teachers.

3.2.2. Integrated Approach

All the language and social science teachers (15/50) shared that they adopt integrated method of teaching values. Subject is not a barrier to practice integrated approach, they perceived. Every lesson and every event in the class is an occasion for sharing values. One lady teacher shared her experience that she has only one goal in teaching English that is to make her children do better in life. Yet another higher secondary teacher shared her experience that when she starts any extra explanation in the class, students show their dis-interest. According her present day generation is interested only in material gain, and nothing else. She opined from her 19 years' teaching experience, that in the life of 90% students, no character formation occurs through school life. 50% teachers who are in the teaching field for more than 20 years (6/12) are hopeless about the present generation. 5/50 teachers shared that

without looking for immediate result, they try to sow the seed of values, and they are sure that it will sprout in due season. All the above five enlightened the researcher with some beautiful experiences of theirs, where they got very exciting and unexpected positive results from students. 7/50 teachers consider all the events of school life are occasions to inculcate values. "There is nothing in the school which is not value oriented," shared one English teacher. She added, how every event is transformed into value embedded programmes for her students. Activity classes and games periods are the best opportunities to build self-confidence leadership and to transfer values observed sports teachers.

3.2.3. Celebrations and Special School Events

Apart from daily classes and subject teaching, competitions, programmes, cultural events, celebrations, picnics and tours, games period, house meetings and events etc. are special occasions where values can be easily incorporated, all shared (50/50). All schools (10/10) have value sharing sessions as a part of daily assembly as thought for the day. 6/10 schools have class special assemblies once a year, they present it totally value based, with events and skits and stories. 3/10 schools have house wise special assemblies. There are special celebrations which inculcate patriotism (national festivals), religious harmony (religious feasts of different religions like Diwali, Christmas, Id etc). There are two schools which celebrate one religious festival of all religious groups of students studying in their school (2/10).

3.2.4. Spiritual Sessions

All the ten schools have regular prayer sessions, and special prayer services and special assemblies at certain occasions like School re-opening day, year ending day, new-year day etc. Every day morning there is singing of Divine hymn. But only 19/50 teachers correlated this prayer song or recitation of a prayer at the beginning of the day with something spiritual. 7/10 schools have a practice of starting every period with a silent prayer. But to the question on spiritual values 31/50 teachers said about the celebration of religious feast only. 4/10 schools have special prayer sessions. 1/10 school has 15 minutes meditation four days of the week and other two days outside assembly with Mass PT and aerobics. It is a beautiful experience for the entire school. Teachers shared that so every day they start the school with a special Devine touch. Another school (1/10) school has a habit of having silent prayer and praying for special intensions of state, country, teachers, or students or parents. The whole school experience the power of prayer and two parents too shared how they got special blessing through the prayer of the school. The teachers attribute the credit totally to

the present principal in this school 5/5 teachers shared about their prayer experience. Three of them (3/5) shared that they are helping their students to grow in prayer and God relationship. This school has a special prayer cell for teachers of all religions. Among all these teachers only 8/50 said that they are able to touch the heart of students by their prayer, or help them to grow in faith in God.

3.2.5. Social Action

All (10/10) schools have some social action programmes where children participate. Like contributing to help the people affected by natural calamities, or visit some charitable institutions etc. But there are clearly specified and well organised programmes in certain schools which help the students to grow in social concern very much. 3/10 schools have afternoon vernacular schools using the same infrastructure run either free or by a very low fees structure. These schools are run by financial support of English medium schools, but students and teachers are not directly involving for the functioning of the school. 1/10 school has an open school in which students and teachers extend their service in different ways. Providing clothes, arranging picnic, helping for the science practical, preparing the students for annual day programmes etc. 1/10 school has an afternoon vernacular school where a few batches have completed their 10th board examination. Students' yearly contribution and collection using a special coupon are very much supportive for this institutions. There are two more schools (2/10) collected 5-8 lakhs per year using a charity drive, and the amount is spent for very useful and meaningful social action programmes, in which students participate very actively. Very transparent account system and money transaction procedures are kept up in 3/10 schools. Parents and teachers are also very much proud of their schools social commitment and concern.

3.2.6. Modelling

Role modelling is the best means of transferring values. Only two teachers (2/50) are very conscious of their influence on youngsters in imparting values through their life examples and are careful always before students. 3/50 shared that their character is improved, and values became sharpened by teaching moral science or value education classes. For others, though theoretically they know the fact that transformation should occur, either not consciously practicing or not consciously shared. But it is observed that all 50/50 teachers who were interviewed have good reputation in the school, and students have good regard for them. Among the fifty interviewees the researcher found 47/50 are open-minded and sincere in their

words and behaviour. Though teachers are not very conscious of their role always, most of them make good impact on students, observed the researcher.

3.2.7. Parent – Teacher Participation

All interviewees expressed that parental co-operation is very essential for the success of value education classes (50/50), and all the schools have various regular strategies to enable parent participation. 30/50 participants agreed that school takes maximum efforts to make parental collaboration a successful practice in the school. 12/50 teachers observed that in spite of all efforts and continuous reminder 5- 7 % parents do not co-operate with school, in the process of students education. 30/50 participants opined that 50-70% parents do not like any sort of negative opinions or corrections regarding their children in PTMs or in personal meetings. For them whatever their children share is true; and what teacher says or what school says is not true. This trend of parents is on increase, compared to last ten years observed 10/50 interviewees. So in spite of all attempts, value education is not actually happening due to negative parental role/involvement. 2/50 teachers very strongly criticized parental irresponsibility with regard to character formation of their children. At present more parents are interested in finding fault with teachers and school, and it adversely affects the character formation of students, opined 20/50 participants. Parental criticisms reduced students respect for teachers, they said.

4/10 schools arrange awareness programmes, and interactive sessions to educate and equip parents regarding good parenting, and psychological approaches in dealing with present generation as per the changing scenario. Such programmes are praiseworthy and they give awareness to parents regarding external negative influence upon the present generation.

3.2.8. Counselling and Guidance

All teachers 50/50 agreed that counselling and personal guidance help in character formation of students. Only 2/10 schools have regular and continuous practice of student counselling and support. 2/10 other schools have counsellors only as part time, and on the basis on convenience. All teachers (50/50) opined that they give listening ear to children when they are in need, but it is not practical. Only 2/50 teachers try to meet all students of her class at least once a year. Others even though desire, they have many challenges; time table, overcrowded class rooms, excess syllabus etc. No school specially equip teachers for guidance and counselling, except giving orientation programmes at the beginning of the session and reminders in the staff meetings.

3.2.9. Value Conflicts

Interviewees shared that present generation is very much influenced by media and technology. The day by day deterioration of values among adolescence, increased crime rate and unhealthy practices are due to the over-use of media, observed 40/50 interviewees. School cannot control such things, but only parents can do better. So parents are to be guided, that is an important responsibility of present day schools, added three teachers (3/50). School cannot influence parents in the real sense said, two teachers (2/50), with personal experience. Money and power are driving force for families and society, and so money and power become the primary values for students too. From the school such students need only marks and grades, not values and character.

Present day students are more influenced by peers and role models in the media world, shared, 40/50 interviewees. 2/50 shared their experiences that, it is impossible to mould higher secondary level students, and so they do not try to correct or convince students. Unnecessary support of parents, unhealthy family atmosphere etc. influence negatively in the process of character formation of students. The value education model can be seen as below:

3.2. Major Inferences

1. The important points which contribute character formation in students are the following as per St. Chavara's vision.

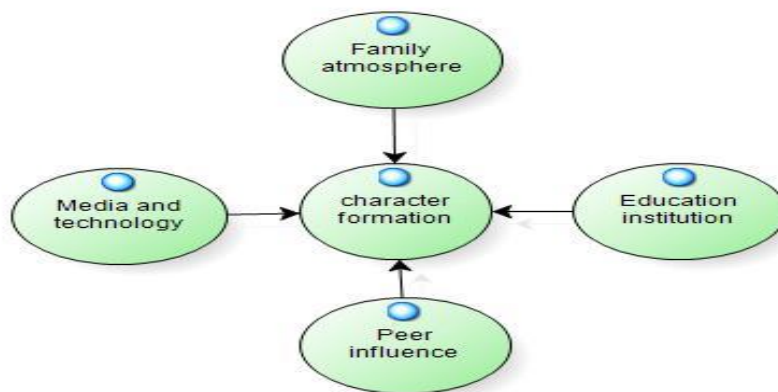


Figure 1: Chavara model of Character formation

2. As per the various experiences of teachers in ten schools in India, the following points are emerged through the thematic analysis of the interview transcripts.

Value education classes in schools contribute to the character formation of students.

Along with value education classes, an integral approach is also essential for imparting values to the students.

Prayer sessions and celebrations of different religious festivals help students to acquire religious values.

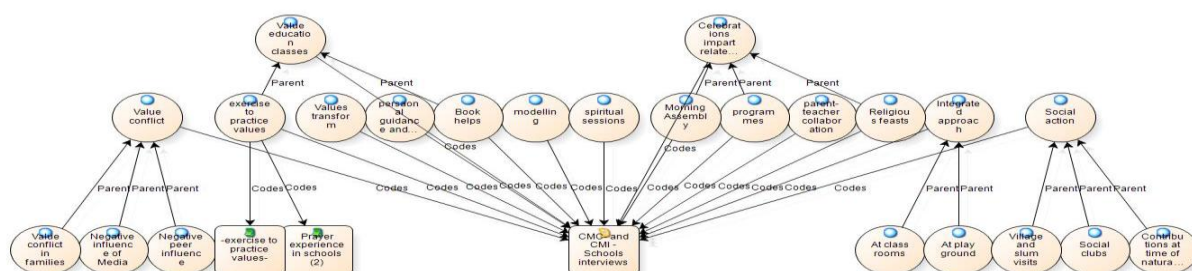
Active participation in Social action programmes add impacts in the social awareness, attitudes and values of students.

Teacher's attitude and life examples facilitate the value acquisition process in the schools. But 'role modelling' is not a special concern for most of the teachers.

Parent – teacher participation facilitates character formation of students.

Peers, Media and technology, and value conflicts at home influence adolescents adversely in spite of schools' efforts in the process of character education.

The emerged character education model in CMI CMC schools in India as shown in figure 2:



3.3. Educational Implications

Knitting character education into school curriculum and following an integrated approach are found significant and effective. So preparing teachers through training programmes and in-service programmes for the implementation of high quality character education is essential in the present context for developing next generation ethical, responsible and caring citizens. Therefore teacher education programmes could incorporate value education packages and counselling practices in the curriculum. In micro-teaching and during teaching practice some value education classes and counselling practice could be included. It has to be supervised, guided and assessed as in the case of other subjects. Motivation level of teacher trainees has to be kept up for better implementation of value education in schools. Technological expertise is essential for the teachers to guide the present students in the process of value sharing and Character formation for present generation. Parent

teacher collaboration and interactive sessions, orientation programmes for parents etc. has to be taken as the priority of schools.

4. CONCLUSION

A reflective study on the life and vision of St. Chavara, shows that he was a man of God who saw all world realities with a divine vision. For him growth and development of all humans were important. He envisaged an education which transforms students from the narrow boundary of self and makes them effective instruments of social change. An education deeply rooted in spirituality was an answer to the problems of his society in nineteenth century. So also today well integrated programmes are required for developing spiritual quotient. Theoretically speaking present schools and educators are aware of importance of character education, and they formulate different strategies for the purpose. But the visible reality is that many teachers are not consciously working for the character formation of students. So more effective methods are to be developed through reflective learning, meaningful practice, sound moral judgement and open communication. The following quote should make every educators think seriously about the education we impart to our students:

...Gas chambers built by learned engineers. Children poisoned by educated physicians. Infants killed by trained nurses. Women and babies shot and burned by high school and college graduates. So I am suspicious of education. My request is: Help your students become human. Your efforts must never produce learned monsters, skilled psychopaths, educated Eichmanns. Reading, writing, arithmetic are important only if they serve to make our children more human. (Ginott, 2012)

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