



SPIRITUALISM IN EDUCATION – A RESEARCH ARTICLE BASED ON THE THEORETICAL AND PRACTICAL PERSPECTIVES OF EMINENT INDIAN THINKERS

Dr. Rekha Kalia Bhardwaj (Principal)

Hans Raj Mahila Maha Vidyalaya,

(Re-accredited A Grade with 3.83 score, highest in the country &

Recognized as College with Potential for Excellence by UGC.

Role Model College by NAAC Peer Team & Star College by GNDU)

Mahatma Hans Raj Marg, Jalandhar-144008 (Punjab)

A life of strenuous endeavour for human betterment is not possible, if we are not persuaded that life has a meaning..... Many of our students are taught to assume that free-will and personal responsibility are illusions, that human beings are conditioned almost wholly by their physical make-up and the society in which they live, and that the only sense that the religious statements make it emotional and subjective. This is a generation which knows how to doubt but not how to admire, much less to believe. This aimlessness, this indifference to basic issues, is to no small extent, responsible for the decline of standards, for the fading of ideals, for the defeat of human endeavour.

- Dr. Sarvapalli Radhakrishnan

Good teaching is passionate, and it induces an emotional response in students. Good teaching starts with inducing habits of mind, but does not stop there. Good teaching engages practical thinking and problem-solving skills that can be applied in a variety of settings. And good teaching affects student's values, commitments and identities.

- Shulman,

President of the Carnegie Foundation for the
Advancement of teaching

Background

Etymologically, spiritualism means incorporeal/ecclesiastical/religious. A plethora of books/articles are available with varied interpretations dealing with theology, religion and occultism. This word has been associated with different meanings in different cultures and religions because it has been a part of almost all the religions for thousands of years. The sermons often deal with the moral and spiritual matters that are exhorted by many religious people. However, in the present research paper, the word ‘spiritualism’ is not associated with the notes of spiritual workers, so called ‘Gurus’. It is not ostensible like smart class rooms, state-of-the-art infrastructure. There is a need to understand its meaning and then to incorporate it in our educational system in a routine manner. It has proximity with human values like honesty, truthfulness, commitment, integrity, compassion, cosmic, secular vision, brotherhood, scientific outlook, equality among men and women because good deeds and intentions are “gateway to an ampler world”, in Bertrand Russell’s words. Spiritualism lies in the educational philosophy of great visionaries like Swami Dayanand Ji, Mahatma Gandhi, Vivekanand, Rabindranath Tagore, Mahatma Hans Raj (a staunch disciple of Dayanand), Mother Teresa, Dr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam and other such spiritual leaders who tried to reconstruct our Indian society through their educational philosophy, putting human values on the top.

There is a need to understand that the system of higher education now existing in India was originally implanted by British Rulers in the mid-19th century to serve the colonial, economic, political and administrative interests, and particular, to consolidate and maintain their dominance in the country. However, to counter the systems of the British dominance, five revolutions simultaneously occurred in India: the **urban revolution**, the **industrial revolution**, the **national revolution**, the **democratic revolution** and the **social revolution**. The thinker-activists of 19th century India realized that they will achieve significant objective of reforming Indian society and the common thread to weave this tapestry was the **field of education**. It was the reform movements which provided much needed impetus to education on modern lines. The Brahma Samaj, the Arya Samaj and numerous other Hindu institutions provided the encouragement to establish various colleges in the country. R.C. Majumdar puts it: *The general awakening of modern India would have not been possible without significant changes in the educational ideas and institutions of the country.*

It is a matter to feel proud that our motherland has produced eminent thinkers-cum-educational visionaries like Gandhiji, Vivekanand, Dr. S. Radhakrishnan and many others who have been sensitive towards social vices and tried to eradicate these in the best possible manner through personal efforts and practical examples. They could influence others tremendously because their education is not based on **theoretical arguments** only but on **universal, rational** and **verifiable** concerns which lead to harmony and constructive thoughts. Hence, these educational philosophers have rightly been called social reformers. Swami Vivekanand, a premier social reformer and educationist, sought to modernize the nation in its social and cultural harmony. He conceived of education as the *primary means of rebuilding Indian society*. Pandit Nehru, the first Prime Minister of India, described Dr. S. Radhakrishnan as *an architect of our social institutions*. Dr.S. Radhakrishnan accepted Gandhi as his leader as Gandhi ji had **truthfulness** to the core of his heart. Like Swami Dayanand and Mahatma Gandhi, Mahatma Hansraj ji's objective was to lead the country from the darkness of ignorance to the light of knowledge and to build the high characters of his students.

The primary concern of all these educational visionaries is **character building** that leads to other virtues automatically. Gandhi ji considered a strong character as the basic of a good citizen, endorsed by Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, A.P.J. Abdul Kalam and others. They viewed it as a *dynamic force* proceeding towards a definite direction. With right direction, students hardly become problems for institutions/society; rather, they ponder over the ills of society. The following lines need our attention:

Your education is absolutely worthless, if it is not built on solid foundation of truth and purity. If you, boys, are not careful about the personal purity of your lives, and if you are not careful about being pure in thought, speech and deeds, then I tell you that you are lost, although you may become perfect finished scholars.

Mahatma Gandhi

Even the least work done for others awakens the power within; even thinking the least good of others gradually instills into the heart, the strength of a lion. I love you all ever so much, but I wish you all to die working for others.

Swami Vivekanand

Mother Teresa saw the creation of a new man who will become aware of dormant energies and use them for the *welfare of mankind*.

There is a drastic need to understand the theoretical and practical perspectives of spiritual education propounded by eminent Indian thinkers. In order to understand spiritualism, we must know the difference between literacy and education, as Mahatma Gandhi said and further endorsed by Dr. S. Radhakrishnan. Literacy gives information, makes us knowledgeable as far as bookish knowledge is concerned. Education, on the other hand, is the “holistic” growth in Gandhiji’s world. It promotes wisdom, righteousness and “character building” is the chief aim of education. Our educational visionaries could foresee the ill of education if it is separated from the practical knowledge and values as we discern today.

Needless to say that modern age is of technology, computers, internet, globalization, mechanization, urbanization, commercialization where fast moving vehicles, electric gadgets and electronic devices do not require slow-motioned sermons. However, in reality, this advancement of technology has converted the man into a machine. The blind rat race for materialism has degraded a human being to the level of a commodity. Man has been pitifully reduced to the status of a consumer and he is the first and the last consumer now. Modern education teaches us to think about everything, but not the thinking process itself. In the modern curricula, there is a scope for teaching about and putting into practice everything ranging from space shuttles to micro-chip processors, from genetic engineering to heart transplant but not simple human values as love, mercy, compassion, respect for others. The paradox of our time is that we have multiplied our possessions, but reduced our values. We have been all the way to the moon and back, but have trouble crossing the street to meet the new neighbour. We have conquered outer space, but not inner space. We have done larger things, but not better things. We have cleaned up the air, but polluted the soul. We have learned how to make a living, but not a life; we have added years to life, not life to years.

It is disheartening to see that majority of our youth is with deteriorating values, mortgaged integrity, soul tumours. Disharmony is escalating in every nook and corner. Spiritual consciousness is woefully missing. Some of the universities/ institutions have literally become the political dens, breeding hatred, greed, prejudice and violence. Take any newspaper,

magazine, university news, our heads hang in shame when we read news related to students'/teachers' strikes, group clashes, kidnappings, rapes, gang rapes, suicides, attacks on teachers, damage of public property. I'd like to quote words of Padambhushan U.R. Rao's speech, delivered on 10th Sept. 2004, at the Sixth Convocation of Tejpur, "Most of our universities, which ought to be a 'place of light, of liberty and learning' have sadly degenerated into poor manufacturing outfits for injecting second hand capsuled knowledge and its poor reproduction on an archaic examination system." Mushrooming and proliferation of technical and management, B.Ed., medical, para-medical institutes, particularly during the last decade, propelled by the highly speculative demand, has resulted in the severe degradation of the quality of education. Sadly, we are producing valueless degree holders, the dismal picture of youth and society is before us where seven deadly sins quoted by Mahatma Gandhiji are dominant.

Wealth without work.

Knowledge without character.

Commerce without morality.

Pleasure without conscience.

Science without humanity.

Religion without sacrifice.

Politics without principle.

Since we are producing degree/diploma holders quantitatively, not qualitatively, vigorous emphasis is laid on healthy practices/value education/quality programmes, akin to spiritualism, by educational bodies of the National Council of Education Research and Training (NCERT), the National Open School, Universities, the University Grants Commission (UGC), NAAC. Only those institutions would survive and flourish which could impart spiritual education and others would go to the dogs. Consequently, frequent workshops/conferences/seminars are organized to initiate discussions on spiritualism in education which lends to quality and quality ambience.

Aims and Methodology

It is widely acknowledged that an educational institution is a rendezvous for teachers, parents, staff, would be employers, funding agencies and society in general. They are all the stakeholders, responsible for the present educational system sans values. Teacher is the main anchor for the promotions of spiritual training with character building. He needs to be worthy of

emulations by his pupils. Impact of the teachers is great on the minds of students. Gandhiji had profound faith in the power of example in character building as he writes:-

To develop the spirit is to building character and to enable one to work towards knowledge as God and self realization.....it was not through books that one could impart training of the spirit, just as physical exercise, and intellectual through intellectual exercise even so the training of the spirit was possible only through the exercise of the spirit. And the exercise of the spirit entirely depended on the life and character of the teacher. The teacher had always to be mindful of his (students) whether he was midst of them or not.

- Mahatma Gandhi

Character building is the proper foundation for student's education because if the foundation is firmly laid, the children can learn all the other things themselves with the assistance of friends. Character is the expression of "the whole personality including its ethical and spiritual aspect". Like Mahatma Gandhi, Dr. Radhakrishnan also believes in spiritual purity of characters.

Teacher's role is paramount to mould the personality of students. In our holy books, teacher is considered to be next to God. A large number of books are available on spiritual writings. But a million dollar question is whether we, the teachers can inculcate spiritual education simply by directing the students to go to library and read the voluminous books. The answer is a big no. There is no need to give definitions of values because these are a set of principles or standards of behaviour, that are regarded as desirable, important and held in high esteem by each of us. Educational institutions are the fittest places for spiritual education and the teachers are the best anchors to impart this education. Through my personal experiences of teaching which is more than of three decades, it is a strong belief that spiritual education is not the sermons but should seamlessly be integrated with the subject to add values as our eminent thinkers have done. Gandhiji is the live example of cementing theory and practice. The roots of all great thinking and noble living lie deep in life itself and not in the dry light of mere reasoning. Our young learners do not want robots in the garb of teachers. A real teacher wins the confidence of his students through his conduct and personal behaviour. All subjects in science, arts, commerce be inspired by intuitive experiences. Intuitive life, spiritual wisdom at

its highest, is a “type of achievement which belongs only to the highest range of mental life”, in Dr. Radhakrishnan’s words. Let us quote a few examples:-

Maths

By giving algebraic formulae or definitions of sets, students can learn certain golden principles of life.

$$+ \quad - \quad = \quad -$$

What we ought to do and we do not do it – result negative.

$$- \quad + \quad = \quad -$$

What we ought not to do and we do it – result negative.

$$+ \quad + \quad = \quad +$$

What we ought to do and we do it – positive.

While defining sets, the students may be told that besides being a collection of defined objects, set represents order as well which is badly needed in our life.

History

Purpose: Not just to learn history but also to learn through History. History repeats itself as after night, there is day. Today, most of our students know the history of Salman Khan/Shahrukh Khan/Ranvir Kapoor, the glamorous stars of film industry. Teachers should create interest among the students to learn History of our educational visionaries – Mahatma Gandhi, Vivekanand, Dr. Radhakrishnan, Mother Teresa, Nelson Mandela and Abdul Kalam – the living embodiments of spiritual education.

Geography

We teach our children the location of gold, silver etc. Do teach them the location of values.

Psychology

Teaching of psychology takes into cognizance not only the Freudian/Jungian principles but also aims at the application of psycho-therapeutic techniques to resolve emotional conflicts and manage the various stress of life. By these ways, the students not only give vent to their

suppressed emotions but also become sensitive towards the problems of others. They can be made to understand better the interpersonal relationships.

Commerce

Commerce education empowers learners with knowledge and skills as a basis for becoming a successful businessman. Students are taught accountancy, preparation of balance sheet. Do teach students to do 'soul accounting, and spiritual audit. Without morality, commerce is useless.

Science

Before teaching the subjects of Chemistry, Physics, the students be acquainted with scientific outlook, i.e., it has no discrimination on the basis of caste, colour or creed. Scientific rules are applicable on each of us. In our scripture, **Rigveda**, all elements of nature, like sun, earth, water and universe are worshipped because these are life givers. In the present age of IT, we are deviating from nature and inviting innumerable physical as well as mental diseases.

- Discuss **Green Chemistry** to sensitize the students to air, earth and water pollution in simple ways. The meaning of Shanti Mahamantra given by our sages (ecologically conscious) be remembered, chanted and acted upon:

May Peace flow to us from Celestial regions

May Peace flow to us from Space

Let there be peace on Earth

May Peace flow to us from the Waters

May Peace flow to us from Medicinal Plants

May Peace flow to us from Vegetation

May Peace flow to us from nature's Bounties

May Peace flow to us from Divine Knowledge

May Peace flow to us from Every Source

May Peace & only Peace flow to us

May that Peace flow to us

Om! Peace! Peace! Peace!

- Through **Physics**, the ills of excessive use of mobile phones and internet be discussed which are eye-opener. The radiations cause adverse effects on our brains. Laws of Conservation of energy which is the basic fundamental law of physics motivates to have positive attitude for holistic development of personality and good-bye to negativity. On the contrary, the reading of good books gives us solace and happiness.
- A **Botany** teacher can highlight the uses of vegetables and medicinal plants and bad effects of junk food while teaching serious chapters of Botany.

Visual Arts

Rhythm is not possible if all strings of our musical instruments are not properly tuned. Similarly, proper tuning of our body and mind is a must if we want to contribute something substantial to the society.

Language

Language should be sweet, positive and motivational. Quotable quotes be used, sometimes, poetic expressions, too impress and motivate the students. The teacher should do his/her best to break the monotony and create a healthy environment to make teaching quality and value oriented. A few expressions are:-

- Nothing is good or bad but thinking makes it so.
- Do not allow anything to be an obstacle, see everything as a stepping stone to victory.
- Winning does not always mean being first, winning you are doing better than you have done before – Bozzie Bellia

Teacher should have a positive, humane approach: Humane approach is the greatest virtue that acts like a catalyst. The foremost quality of being humane itself adds to value education. I'm reminded of Dr. Radhakrishnan's words that when he touched the cheeks of sick Stalin, the latter became tearful and said that only Dr. Radhakrishnan treated him like a human being but not as a monster. A sensitive and psychological handling by the teacher can turn even the most indifferent student into a life long learner. The aim of spiritual education is to transform the negativity into positively and spiritual purity comes through the truthfulness of one's conduct of life.

Conclusion and Suggestions

A proper understanding of educational philosophy of our educational visionaries could make education as a highly moral activity as Gandhiji perceived and conceived. Swami Vivekanand once said, *Education which does not help the common mass of people to equip themselves for the struggle of life, which does not bring about the strength of character, a spirit of philosophy and courage of a lion, is it worth the name. Real education is that which enables one to stand on one's own legs.*

Spiritualism in education will cultivate new knowledge, to **interpret old knowledge and belief in the light of new needs and discoveries** to provide the right kind of leadership in all walks of life. The most significant feature is to include youth from all sections of society, to develop their full potential; to help to cultivate the right interest, attitudes, moral and intellectual values and to strive to promote equality and social justice and to reduce social and cultural difference through diffusion of education, especially higher education.

It is the moral duty as well as responsibility of educationists and parents to understand that students be given proper education from all quarters so that they may be saved from the decaying social set up and educational system that produces **valueless degree holders**. As Gandhiji became both the father and the teacher for his pupils; similarly, parents have to impart values at home; teachers have to be the **role models** in schools/colleges/universities because these educational institutions produce the nation-builders, i.e. **would be leaders**. It is not difficult but an urge is required among the teachers to create such an environment as gives real education. A teacher must be aware of his/her role as a mentor, philosopher, guide and evaluator. Our teaching be **student – focused, community oriented and value-based**. In our routine teaching, values be **seamlessly integrated** with our teaching. If we put a bit of the philosophy of our eminent thinkers-cum-social reformers, our teaching, indeed, becomes the most rewarding of all careers. Right education will produce **upright and morally strong models** in the form of leaders of states and nation. It is the right time to understand and implement genuinely the educational philosophy of our social reformers in the practical form because it will only be a panacea for redeeming modern education. It is beautifully said:

Where there is righteousness in the heart

There is beauty in character,

*Where there is beauty in character,
There is harmony in the home.
Where there is harmony in the home,
There is order in the nation.
Where there is order in the nation,
There is peace in the world.*

Keywords:- Spiritualism, Educational Philosophy, Holistic Growth, Consciousness, Righteousness, Social transformation, humane approach, academic oriented, value added, quality ambience, sermons.

References

- **Assessment Report** for Institutional Re-accreditation of Hans Raj Mahila Maha Vidyalaya, Jalandhar (29th – 31st Oct., 2012).
- Callahan, sterling G. *Successful Teaching*, New Delhi : Eurasia Publishing House.
- Ciulla, Joanne B. **The Ethics of Leadership (2003)**. Replica Press.
- College News – **A Quarterly Journal of Higher Education**. No. 43-44. Association of Indian College Principals.
- **Encyclopedia International** (1973) – New York; Lexicon Publications.
- **Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics**, Vol.XI (1967) New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons.
- Gandhi, Mahatma, *An Autobiography (1927)*, Ahmedabad Navjivan Publishing House.
- *Journal: Education Punjab (2006)*, Chandigarh: Director of Public Instructions
- Kalam, APJ Abdul. *Guiding Souls (2005)*, New Delhi: Ocean Book Pvt. Ltd.
- Radhakrishanan, S. *An Idealist view of life (1979)*; Calcutta: Blackie and Sons (India) Ltd.
- Radhakrishanan, S. *Religion and Society (1995)*, New Delhi: Indus
- Radhakrishanan, S. *Occasional speeches and writings (1956)*, The Publication Division
- Ramchandra, Guha (ed). **Makers of Modern India (2010)**. Penguin Books.
- Rao, T.V. & Raju. **The Power of 360 Degree Feedback (2010)**. Response Books.
- R.C. Majumdar (et all). **An Advanced History of India (1990)**. Macmillan.
- Rowe, W. Glenn & Laura Guerrcno (2010). **Cases in Leadership**. Sage Publications.

- Ruhela, Satya Paul, (ed). **Human Values and Education (1986)**. New Delhi: Sterling Publishers.
- Sinha, Lakshmi. *Humanistic Trends in Indian Ethics (1986)*. New Delhi: Capital Publishing House.
- Sharma Robin. **Leadership Wisdom (2011)**. Jaico Publishing House.
- Tara, Chand. **A History of Freedom Movement in India Vol. II (1992)**. New Delhi: GOI.
- University News: *A weekly Journal of Higher Education*. Published by the Association of Indian Universities.