

24. Partial education

TERMITES appear insignificant and innocent in the beginning; they are named 'white ants,' as if they deserve admiration and attention, rather than extermination. For, they multiply fast and destroy in silence the entire structures of the houses of man.

Bad habits, imitative tendencies like drink and drugs, gambling and gangsterism---they secure entry into individual and social behaviour noiselessly, in various disguises and then destroy the career of even the toughest and the most upright. The youth of India are succumbing to the siren calls of foreign cultural traits. They are discarding their own precious heritage of reverence towards elders, service of parents, compassion for all beings in distress, humility, simplicity, adherence to truth and attachment to self-respect. Science and technology have encouraged the material out-look, concentrated all effort towards comforts and exaggerated the ego. The same sad decline is happening, more or less, in every country today.

Man is behaving mostly as animal, partly as man

The prime cause for this tragedy is the neglect of the spiritual and moral aspects of the human personality. Man feels no obligation towards family, society, nation or mankind. He worships his ego, more than any thing else. He is proud of his technological advance---the travel in space, the computers, the unravelling of the atom. But, look at the confusion and the conflicts in the political, economic spheres of life! Man has not been able to overcome greed, pride and hatred in the national and religious aspects. His narrow loyalties towards his caste, colour and creed persist to the detriment of higher ideals. Confusion in the sphere of education has grown into enormous proportions. He has not yet been successful in sublimating his animal impulses into human attitudes. He is therefore behaving in a ridiculous manner, mostly animal and partly man.

Today, man is madly engaged in accumulating money for the sake of the comforts it can bring. He is wading in sorrow and joy from moment to moment, in the pursuit of sensual pleasure. Just as death follows life, anxiety follows wealth. The rich man is persecuted by troubles just as a crow with a piece of meat is pursued by dozens of hungry birds who follow the crow. Man's ambitions are increasing every day everywhere. Contemporary civilisation is piling fear upon fear on all parts of the world.

Instead of high thinking and simple living which was the ideal of ancient times, modern India is adopting the ideal of 'low thinking and high living. The system of education is to blame largely for this downfall. Mahaathma Gandhi realised the eternal values enshrined in Bhaaratheeya Culture. He attempted to promote these values through the primary schools he sponsored. When he was in prison, a British officer who visited him often asked him, "I find you sad and worried today. Tell me why?" and Gandhi replied, "I find that the educated person has a hardened heart, more hardened than the heart of an uneducated person. This is something that should not happen. The system is fraught with danger." This made Gandhi try his experiments in imparting Indian ideals to the tender minds in primary schools. The same officer approached Baa! Gangadhar Thilak later and told him how Gandhi had accused Western education of hardening the heart. He asked Thilak, "But, I find you have not been spoiled at all by the Western system of education." Thilak replied, "I asserted that I am what I am, inspite of the system of education through which I had to pass."

The Right and the Duty are both fundamental

Men repeat the word 'duty' day after day and during all hours of the day, without any clear conception of what that word means. Duty arises when there are two people, you and another. Education has lost its meaning when it does not instruct what an individual should render to society, how he has to control his ego for ensuring the common good. One individual has the right to exercise freedom, only so long as he does not obstruct the freedom which is equally the right of another. Honouring the right of the other man to freedom is your duty. The right and the duty are both fundamental. Nevertheless, we find everyone fostering and insisting on his own rights and paying no consideration to the rights of others. We find in society, around us, millions of brothers and sisters subjected to harm by this callousness.

There are 500,000 villages in India where people live in poverty, ignorance and disease. Rulers forming the Government have drawn up various plans to raise their standard of living, but it is wrong to leave it all to them. It cannot be done by the efforts of government alone. The hearty co-operation, help and good-will of the villagers themselves are essential. A single flower cannot make a garland; a single individual cannot set right the wrong of ages.

Children have to learn the lesson of self-reliance

Crores of children live as beggars in the streets. It is the responsibility of the grownups to wean them away and enable them to become self-reliant, self-respecting citizens. Older people are like old trees; they cannot be bent in the direction which is good for them. But, these tender saplings can be trained to grow straight and strong. So, I wish to declare that the first duty of every adult, son and daughter of this country is to pay loving attention to the children.

I call-upon you to resolve to establish a primary school and arrange for medical care for every village. Wealth is intended not for adding luxury to life, for revelling in sensual joy. Through good sanitation and good education you can improve the condition of the children. If it is your intention to raise India, once again, into an example and ideal for the rest of the world, it can be achieved only by hard physical work and by systematic reduction of desires.

In the sacred land of Bhaarath where Annapoorna, the Goddess designated as food, is worshipped, there need be no shortage of food for the people. Controlling population is not the right remedy. For, consider this: Every child is born not only with a stomach that has to be catered to, it is also endowed with two hands which can work and produce the food for the stomach. The hands have to be given the strength and skill; they have to learn the lesson of self-reliance. They should never be lazy or slothful. Then, there can be no deficiency in food and no problem of underfeeding.

Today a Degree is only a begging bowl

We have to inspire and instruct the children to become *Karma Veers* (heroes of action), whose lives are dedicated to work as worship of the one God who resides in all. They must be trained to take part gladly and intelligently in "activity programmes" filled with the spirit of service.

In order to make the primary schools succeed in this endeavour, see that you run them with patience and love. Now after spending thousands of rupees and mortgaging or selling their lands and houses, the parents are happy that their sons and daughters have got a degree. But, they suffer great sorrow when the degree is discovered to be only a begging bowl with which their children go round from office to office. Instead of education for doing the work of society, we

are having education for jobs which society has to create to give them work. The head is loaded with trivial information and the heart is hardened.

Degrees are conferred even if the candidate secures 30 marks out of 100. This means that a person is certified useful, even if he commits 70 mistakes in every hundred items of work assigned to him by the authorities. The parents and the teachers must be examples of lives led in the light of *aathmic* consciousness. Then we can have a balanced education. Then we can have a generation of students wedded to the service of society, for each student will see in every other person a replica of the Divine Itself.

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There are many who have stacked libraries in their brains; who have visited and venerated all the holy places between the Himaalayas and the Cape; who have sat at the feet of every one of the contemporary sages and saints; who have performed all the rites prescribed in the sacred texts, but, who do not know the answer to the simple question: "How to bring about the union between jeeva and Brahman, the individual and the Universal?"

Or rather, they do not set about the practice of what they have heard or learnt.

The erection of temples, the installation of images or idols, the pomp and show, fireworks and fanfare, processions and pedantries---these are helpless in the realm of jnaana.

Sri Sathya Sai