

## 28. Spiritualise Education

*Faith in God has declined*

*Reverence is at a discount*

*Atheism is rampant*

*Es teem for the Guru is gone*

*Devotion has no place*

*The age-old culture is ignored*

*Respect for the good has vanished*

*This is our education today*

*NAHI jnaanena sadrusam pavitramiha vidhyate* (In the world there is nothing as sacred as *jnana*, the highest knowledge). There is nothing more precious in the world than true education. It reveals the divinity that sustains the universe and promotes the welfare of mankind materially, mentally and socially. Only through education do we understand creation and the truth about humanity. Those who realise the nature of the Divine can know the relationship between Nature, society and the infinite potential of man. Instead of being subject to Nature, man can acquire, through education, the knowledge to utilise the forces of Nature. Thereby *Sat-Chit-Ananda* (Supreme Being-Total Awareness- Divine Bliss) can be experienced.

### **From Spirit to Nature**

In the educational system today, the spiritual element has no place. This cannot be true education. Education must proceed primarily from the Spirit to Nature. It must show that mankind constitutes one Divine family. The divinity that is present, in society can be experienced only through individuals. Education today, however, ends with the acquisition of degrees. Real education should enable one to utilise the knowledge one has acquired to meet the challenges of life and to make all human beings happy as far as possible. Born in society, one has the duty to work for the welfare and progress of society.

The knowledge gained from education is being misused today solely to obtain and enjoy creature comforts and sensuous pleasures. This education has served to develop some kind of intellectual abilities and technical skills, but has totally failed to develop good qualities. Society today is steeped in materialism because of the preoccupation with mundane pleasures.

Only in the institute here can be witnessed the emphasis on the divinity inherent in man. In olden days, when the pupils completed their educational tenure in the *ashram* of the guru and were about to enter the life of a *grihastha* (householder), the preceptor gave them a parting message to serve them as guidelines for their worldly and spiritual good. That ceremony is observed today as a Convocation.

### **Qualities which reveal true education**

Education does not mean imparting of verbal knowledge. The knowledge that is gathered in schools and colleges should be capable of being used for service to society and helping to improve the conditions of one's fellow men. The place where true teachers and students are gathered should be filled with serene peace and orderliness. On the contrary, we find today that

where students gather fear and insecurity prevail. Peace and order are not to be seen. This does not redound to the credit of education. Students, whose hearts should be soft and compassionate, have become hard-hearted and violent. Humility, reverence, compassion, forbearance, sacrifice and self-control are the qualities which reveal the outcome of true education.

Science and technology have made astonishing progress, but humanity is going on the downward path. There are undoubtedly many brilliant scholars and scientists in the world today. But science alone is not enough. There must be discrimination for utilising the discoveries of science for right purposes. Science without discrimination, human existence without discipline, friendship without gratitude, music without melody, a society without morality and justice cannot be of benefit to the people.

Scientists and technologists are doing wonders today in the field of synthetics, electronics, atomic energy and exploration of outer space. On the one side, we have this astounding progress in science. On the other side, we are witnessing political and economic chaos, national, racial and religious conflicts, provincialism and student unrest indicating the free play of divisive forces. How are we to account for this contradiction--scientific advancement on the one hand and deterioration in human behaviour on the other? The reason is that along side the growth in knowledge, ignorance is also *growing pari passu*. What is the reason for this decline in human character and the growth of violence and hatred?

### **People are losing the zest for living**

There is a marked increase in bad qualities, evil actions and cruel traits among human beings compared to the past. If the reasons for this growth are examined, it will be found that it is due to the continued predominance of animal instincts in man. How else can we explain the fact that in 5500 years of recorded human history, there have been as many as 15000 wars? Even now, men are not free from the fear of war. It is these wars that have progressively dehumanised mankind and eroded all regard for human values. The constant fear that at any moment one may lose his life in some conflict or the other has an oppressive effect on the mind. This is mainly responsible for men losing the zest for living. It is not external wars alone that is responsible for this. The general climate of conditions in which men-live also contributes to fear and uncertainty.

Men are becoming increasingly selfish and self-centered. How can such egocentric persons derive happiness from society or contribute to the happiness of the society? There is a scramble even for buying tickets for a film show or getting into a bus. Immersed entirely in selfish concerns, men have no regard for the interests of the others. Every step is governed by self-interest. In whatever he sees, says or does, self-interest alone is dominant. This kind of selfishness must be totally eliminated among students.

Increasing numbers of persons are seeking education, not for learning but for acquiring the means to gratify their desires. Education today has nothing sacred about it. The students have no steadiness of mind even for a moment. With this instability, how can they pursue studies with earnestness? The authorities also do not offer proper help or encouragement.

### **Reasons for failure of education system**

At the time when the country became free, there were 30 crores of illiterates. By 1983 this figure has gone upto 44 crores. Illiteracy is increasing everyday. By A.D. 2000 this figure may go upto 50 crores!

It is true that schools are in the increase and student enrolment has been going up considerably. But illiteracy is also increasing. Part of the reason for this is that large numbers of those who go to primary schools drop out after 2 or 3 years and lapse into illiteracy. There is no genuine urge for learning. Moreover, the financial provision for education, which was 7% of the Plan Outlay in the First Plan, had come down to 3.5% by the Sixth Plan. Many schools are not able to find money even for blackboards and chalk pieces. Even in the universities, the position of Vice-chancellors is becoming difficult owing to non-receipt of grants. As a result, teachers are getting frustrated and discontented.

Problems such as these are continually growing in the educational field. The reason for this is the dependence of educational institutions on the government. Once they are divorced from the government, the problems will be solved. In the past Saraswati (the Goddess of Learning) had no association with the powers that be. Today even Saraswati has been chained to the government. Consequently institutions have lost their freedom.

### **Government and education**

When a boy at school is asked today what he is doing, he answers: "I am *buying education*" ("*Chaduvu kontunnaanu*", in Telugu) instead of saying "I am learning" ("*Chaduvu kuntunnaanu*"). Thousands of rupees have to be paid for getting admission even to the primary classes. What is the benefit that can accrue to the world as a result of education received in this way? The students have no capacity to understand any of the problems of the contemporary world--economic, political, social, moral or other problems. The teachers in old times exhorted their pupils to follow *Sathyam Vada* (speak the truth). In today's parlance, the exhortation is' *Sathyam Vadha* (Destroy Truth)! Education today does not impart to the students the capacity or grit to face the challenges of daily life. The educational field has become the playing ground of ignorance.

In this state of things, the students cannot be blamed. Students must be enabled to prepare themselves to serve society with pure minds. Today they do not have even a sense of gratitude towards their parents for all the sacrifices they make to educate their children. The students acquire degrees and they go about begging for jobs. They should acquire rather the capacity to stand on their own legs and be self-reliant. They should, above all, develop good character. They should be able to take up any work and acquit themselves well. They should place love of the Motherland above everything else.

### **Rights and duties are both important**

Men today are concerned solely about their rights and have no regard for their duties, obligations and responsibilities. Universities today have become factories for turning out degree holders and not real centres for knowledge. Education should serve to develop powers of discrimination and foster the sense of patriotism so that the educated may engage themselves in service to society.

Lacking in love for the Motherland, many today are hankering after foreign things. We should not have aversion to anything. But esteem for things national is essential. Appreciation and regard for one's own country and its achievements is a sacred duty (*Dharma*). It is not the mark of good education if one forgets one's own country and goes after the exotic.

Students! It is not enough if you acquire degrees. Along with them you should acquire general knowledge and common sense. There is a wide gap between your learning and our culture, Scholarship without culture is valueless. Both have to go together.

The Taithiriya Upanishad exhorts the student to look upon one's father, mother, teacher and guest as God. Students today have little respect for parents or God. They lack even confidence in themselves. How can those who have no self-confidence get self-satisfaction?

### **Degrees alone not enough**

Education should not be merely for earning a living. It should enable one to lead an exemplary life. The right teacher is one who is an embodiment of love and teaches the student to love all, to cultivate the right relationships and to develop human qualities. Teachers who will promote qualities of mutual love and regard in their students are sorely needed today.

We do not need today a new faith or creed, nor a new system of education. Nor do we need to create a new society. All we need are men and women who have pure and loving-hearts. Their hearts must be filled with sacred feelings. The transformation has to be effected in the minds of the people. The mind should be brought under the control of the *buddhi* (intelligence) and not allowed to go after its whims and fancies.

You must become ideal citizens. Revere elders and show respect to everyone. Lead exemplary lives. Eschew selfishness and self-interest. Identify yourselves with the well-being of the society and dedicate yourselves to social service. Students must develop such noble ideas. They must show their gratitude to those who have helped them. You must realise also that ignorance is preferable to knowledge that is not put to right use. As the proverb says: "A docile donkey on which you can ride safely is preferable to a wild, uncontrollable horse."

### **Transform yourselves into men of virtue**

All degrees, scholarships and punditry have no value if one does not have good qualities. Cultivate virtues. Today good qualities (*gunamulu* in Telugu) are forgotten and only good dress (*guddalu* in Telugu) is being flaunted. When one wears white clothes, the heart must also be pure white. The Upanishad declares: "Narayana pervades everything inside and outside." You wear spotless clothes, but the heart inside is filled with bad qualities. You have to transform yourselves into men of virtue. You have to do right actions for cultivating good qualities.

People talk about *Neethi* (morality). Morality simply means right conduct. Without good behaviour there can be no morality. Your moral life in society must express itself in service to the suffering and the helpless. The devotion and understanding that are implicit in selfless service cannot be found in any other thing. You may not get a job, but engage yourself in social service. Bear in mind the inspiring example of Abou Ben Adhem, who loved to serve his fellowmen and thereby earned the grace and love of God.

You are well aware of the deplorable state of the nation. In this situation, remembrance of the name of the lord should be your main support. Have firm faith in God. An animal which had full faith in God became *Nandi* (the Bull), the vehicle of Lord Shiva. A monkey by the constant repetition of Sri Rama's name became the adorable Hanuman. Prahlada, the scion of the Asura {demonic} clan, became divine by his unconquerable faith in God. If such transformation can take place, why should not men become truly human? The fault lies in the perverted thinking of human beings and not in the divinity that is inherent in them.

### **Make every act holy and purposeful**

Sanctify your lives by making every act of daily living holy and purposeful. Students should dedicate themselves to the revival of Bharat's hallowed culture and to the service of the

Motherland. You must uphold the good name of the Institute wherever you are. Revere your parents and make them happy.

My dear students!

You are flowers in God's garden.

You are stars in God's sky.

You are wonderful beings in God's world.

You *must* possess head of Sankaracharya.

You *must* possess heart of Buddha.

You *must* possess hands of Janaka Maharaja.

Then you are perfect men.

*Discourse at the Sixth Convocation, at the Poornachandra Auditorium, on 22-11 - 1987.*