

Editorial

RELIGION AND EDUCATION A Philosophical Appraisal

“We are born human; but we become human.” That is, although physically all of us are born human, socially and culturally we have to become human beings through an arduous and lifelong process carried out within the human community. In fact, this becoming process cannot have a preset end, by the attainment of which the process can be halted or brought to an end. In spite of being an unending process, strategically, life should have proximate ends which we shall approach and realize individually and collectively through persistent and concerted efforts. It has to take into account not only the training of the intellect but also the will of human beings, as they have to balance and integrate the operations of these two vital faculties if they were to achieve a *humane* development. Therefore, the educative process that begins even before we are born forms and transforms us into beings that have a sense of meaning and value in life.

Education¹ is the most important means that initiates a multifarious process of humanizing which has been in vogue from the very beginning of human existence. In general, education involves imparting or acquiring knowledge through which the distinctive powers of reasoning and judgment could be developed, thus, intellectually and integrally preparing human beings to achieve maturity in life. According to S. Radhakrishnan, “the true aim of education should be the production of individuals harmonious in character and creative in spirit.”² Maharishi Mahesh Yogi articulates it further in his famous book, *Science of Being and Art of Living*:

¹The verb “educate,” deriving from the Latin root *educare* (which is from *ex-*, “out” and *ducere*, “lead”), means “to rear,” “to bring up,” “to instruct,” and “to lead forth,” and thus stands for training any person “so as to develop the intellectual and moral powers,” or “to train, discipline so as to develop some special aptitude, taste, or disposition.” Education, as a process, includes both “the systematic instruction ... given to the young [and adult] in preparation for ... life” and a “culture or development of powers, formation of character, as contrasted with the imparting of mere knowledge or skill.” *The Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd Edition (1989), s.v. “educate” and “education.”

²S. Radhakrishnan, *India and China*, Bombay: Hind Kitabs, 1944, 54.

Education aims at culturing the mind of a man to enable him to accomplish all he would like to accomplish in the great field of life. Education should necessarily enable a man to make use of his full potential in the field of his body, mind, and spirit. But it should also develop him in the ability to make the best use of his personality, surroundings, and circumstances so that he may accomplish the maximum in life for himself and for all others.³

Thus, whatever is the method of education adopted by one person or a society, it must be capable of helping them derive those values, goals, and direction that are proper to the socialisation of human beings. Moreover, it should facilitate understanding each one's inner self, potentialities, and possible horizons of development so that he or she could be properly prepared to face the challenges in life and make the best out of life.

Education, whether carried out at home or in an institutional setting, has the potential to mould the minds by way of imparting the core values that have been accepted and acknowledged by the society at large over a long period of time. Education becomes creative of the human spirit if it frees individuals and societies to re-create existing values into more harmonious configuration of life. It shall, however, not envisage a slavish style of adaptation, which will only tend to curtail the human spirit and ingenuity. The ability of those who undergo education to think for themselves, to imagine and to be creative, and, thus, to identify the importance of the values inculcated must be respected and enhanced at all levels. It will result in a healthy and spontaneous acceptance or rejection of the values, paving the way for the development of a mature and vibrant culture or civilization. Thus, education shall be identified as the cornerstone of a civilization, and shall be approached with the uncompromising seriousness that it deserves as the soul of *humane* advance.

In fact, education is capable of initiating processes that may lead either to healthy development of individuals and societies, or to subversive and violent turn of events. History is witness to the fact that many a violent conflict has been initiated by subversive processes of education, and had been instrumental in destabilising thriving cultures and civilizations. However, it shall also be recalled that educative processes

³Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, *Science of Being and Art of Living: Transcendental Meditation*, New York: Meridian, 1995, 208.

have been powerful enough to heal the political and cultural wounds caused by violent overtures – just or unjust – and political uprisings. It is obvious from the previous statements that education as a process can be both creative and destructive at the same time. Assuming that most of the educative endeavours are creative (especially, as it is also possible to transform even a subversive method of education into an ingenious resource for the development of humanity), we shall dwell on the contemporary scene of education, with the goal of highlighting certain positive dimensions that seem to be missing from the models adopted at various levels of institutionalized educative procedures.

Education provides us with a chance to immerse ourselves in distilled *anamnesis* (meaning “memory”) and to the dynamic *poiesis* (meaning “to create anew, make, do”)⁴ by joining the dynamic effects of human freedom to settled culture. The dynamic nature of the process would vary from mild to drastic transformations. It calls for an integration of the riches of the past, creativity of the present, and possibilities of the future. The success of a generation will depend, to a great extent, on its ability to weave together these triple dimensions of human existence consciously and integrally. A civilization will be acclaimed by the later ones only to the extent it has the sagacity to leap above its own trivialities by having its firm foundations on the time-tested values bequeathed from the past, but at the same time determined to keep the wider horizons of the future as hope and reality at the same time. In short, the future, or

⁴The two terms here have their inspiration from the quote of Radhakrishnan, where he proposes “production of individuals harmonious in character and creative in spirit” as the aim of education. See S. Radhakrishnan, *India and China*, 54. But, he does not use the Greek terms. Notice that *anamnesis* is used in the nominative sense, due to the distilled character of whatever the humanity has achieved through the sedimenting nature of every instance of cultural and civilizational past, however perennial a certain culture may value its own “truths” and customs. The concept of *poiesis* is used here in the verbal sense, since it is an educative inculcation of ever-wiser possibilities (future) into the present by forcing possible futures into the present. In short, *poiesis* integrates all the three tenses of human advancement in the spiritual fruits of well-rounded education. It is an on-going process and, hence, partially free. All would agree that the most prized joy and wealth of a teacher (in a wider sense) is in freeing oneself and the students (in the general sense) to witness greater freedoms being kneaded by their private dough, with the admixture of lots and lots of other dough! This is an ongoing process. (I am grateful to Raphael Neelamkavil for suggesting the rich nuances of the Greek expressions used)

realization of the projected possibilities, shall be the hallmark of relevance of any machinery of education.

Education for civilization must have as its integral part an education for philosophizing. Each member of the human race must be enabled to think for himself/herself. Each one must be enabled to initiate a process of ever-enhancing rationale for life and its activities. Openness to the unseen horizons could be facilitated only when humanity is ready to look beyond the past and the present designs: an openness that calls for a readiness to part with the past and the present, a readiness to see through the future, and to recognize the superiority of the posterity to which one has contributed but a little! This will be realized only if each member of humanity is enabled to stand on his/her own feet; it is not a call for rejecting the rich traditions and valued customs; but certainly it envisions the ability on the part of individuals to look beyond what the human civilizations have achieved so far, a courageous but meaningful leap to the unknown, having firm faith in humanity's capacity to bring forth ever fresh and new dimensions to life in its ideal fullness. Though philosophy is largely understood in terms of its logical application, the philosophizing referred to here shall be understood more along a holistic line.⁵ This shall obviously involve all human powers such as thinking, feeling, intuiting (including the spiritual or mystical intuition), etc., all rolled into one. Education to holism by bestowing self-enhancing philosophizing to the individual (which is at the same time other-enhancing) is, perhaps, the intellectual and potentially actualizing summit of any system of education.

At this stage it must be made clear that by education we do not mean mere classroom teaching and learning, although it is an important part of it. To educate, in its real sense, does not mean merely to transmit some skeletal information about one or the other subject from teacher to the students; it is neither merely learning from books, nor memorising some facts. Education must result in changing the inner person; every educational institution – if it is true to its primary task of advancing the humanity beyond distilled *anamnesis* via dynamic *poioieo* into

⁵A statement by Pope John Paul II is pertinent here. He states: “Men and women have at their disposal an array of resources for generating greater knowledge of truth so that their lives may be ever more human. Among these is philosophy, which is directly concerned with asking the question of life's meaning and sketching an answer to it. Philosophy emerges, then, as one of the noblest of human tasks.” Pope John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio* (Encyclical Letter), §3.

actualization of wise possibilities – should bring forth a new humanity through every individual trained in it. The lessons imparted in any educative setting must enable the students to transform their own perspectives or viewpoints. This is creative advance of humanity initiated through education. Wrote Ellen Key in 1900: “Our age cries for personality, but it will ask in vain, until we allow them to have their own will, think their own thoughts, work out their own knowledge, form their own judgments...”⁶ This calls for an extraordinarily critical mind and a capacity on the part of the students to observe, look, or listen for themselves, and thus to form their own judgments. Of course, this runs the risk of deviations and wrong judgments, and a consequent embracing of error instead of truth. Here we identify the relevance of teachers, who shall not only initiate the process of learning, but must be capable of guiding the students on the right path of judgment; it shall, however, not be carried out merely by resorting to age old rules and readymade formulations of civil law and religious dogmas, but through an arduous process of critical and creative thinking that would enable each individual to tread on the right path through the light of his or her own intellect and will. “The Declaration on Christian Education,” issued by Vatican Council II, envisages the same goal for school and collegiate education:

... children and young people must be helped, with the aid of the latest advances in psychology and the arts and science of teaching, to develop harmoniously their physical, moral and intellectual endowments so that they may gradually acquire a mature sense of responsibility in striving endlessly to form their own lives properly and in pursuing true freedom as they surmount the vicissitudes of life with courage and constancy.⁷

From this perspective, education, especially the process of learning, becomes most effective when students live and learn in an atmosphere of freedom within which they are facilitated to discover truth for themselves, rather than being indoctrinated by the system, teachers being the last link in that structural chain.

⁶Ellen Key, *The Century of the Child*, 232, cited in Thorbjorn Lengborn, “Ellen Key,” in Zaghoul Morsy, ed., *Thinkers on Education*, Oxford: Oxford University, 1997, 2:833.

⁷Vatican Council II, “Declaration on Christian Education,” §1.

Education is not a system conceived to inculcate intellectual bondage. Whenever a system of education tends to imprison the human spirit by way of inflexible indoctrination, it does a disservice to humanity.

Our education must not do anything to break the human spirit. In the name of education, we spoil human creativeness, and choke up the springs of wisdom. The great teacher may explain to his pupil the best that has been thought and said, but must leave it to the pupil to think and decide for himself.⁸

It is the sad plight of our society that the curriculum and the method of teaching adopted by many institutions foster a spirit of inordinate uniformity in thinking disregarding the uniqueness of individual students to a great extent. It is high-time that the avenues of education, especially at the early stages, were open to the ingenuity and uniqueness of each student; this would necessarily call for flexibility in the possibilities of customizing the programme of studies. However, given the present scenario of most of the schools in India, especially with a low teacher ratio, making room for individual attention does not seem to be a possibility in any near future, let alone the provisions for student inventiveness in the classroom settings. Indeed, this situation necessitates the complementing mechanism between school and home. While the schools may not be in a position to cater to the individual differences among students, parents and other members at home do have a decisive role in providing for such differences, and in positively enabling them to perfect their talents and special interests. If such a procedure is adopted and cooperation between school and home is achieved, we will succeed in bringing forth many young persons who are harmonious in character, integral in values, and creative in spirit.

Human creativity should be catered to at every step of education. This is especially so because of the human vocation. According to Rabindranath Tagore, a great educationist with a noble vision for a transformed humanity, physical evolution and aggrandizement have

⁸Radhakrishnan, *India and China*, 58; see also Radhakrishnan, *Kalki, or the Future of Civilization*, London: Kegan Paul, 1929, 36: "Our education has not freed us from intellectual bondage. It stimulates the mind without satisfying it. We read poetry, devour fiction, and attend the movies; and think we are cultured. Our rationality is a pretence. We use reason to bolster up our instincts. We invent excuses for what we want to do and set forth arguments for what we want to believe."

already come to its climax in human beings.⁹ This, however, does not mean that evolution and further enhancements have come to an abrupt halt. Human beings, who are endowed with the unique faculty of imagination, have a noble task and an uncompromising responsibility to consciously involve in the further processes of growth by exercising their free choice. As freedom is the birthright of human beings – by virtue of the faculty of reason and imagination that enables them to soar to the highest levels of reality – they take it upon themselves to responsibly transform the very human existence: though partaking in matter their nature is self-conscious; though sharing in the characteristics of animals, they are endowed with the capacity to act against the instincts; though rational, they are enabled to *imagine* the supernatural and reach up to it through their relentless attempts. In fact, it is from this perspective that Immanuel Kant, a philosopher and educationist from the 18th century proposes that children must not be educated simply to achieve the present levels of intelligence, but should aim at the possible better future levels.¹⁰ Such a higher level projected for realization in the educative process will certainly make a student invest the utmost of his or her energies, contributing to the growth and advancement of the individual and the humanity. As Radhakrishnan puts it, “all the great achievements of man in art and architecture, in philosophy and religion, in science and technology, have been due not to the man who has been a slave of his environment but to one who has been a master of his environment and who has been able, therefore, to recast his environment in the manner that he has chosen.”¹¹ This is a clarion call to everyone not to be the slave of the present standards or the victim of the given environment; each one must approach the horizons of life with ingenuity and farsightedness. For, the standard that we set in education

⁹Rabindranath Tagore, “Soul consciousness,” *The English Writings of Rabindranath Tagore: Plays, Stories, and Essays*, Sisir Kumar Das, ed., New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1996, 2: 291-92.

¹⁰Immanuel Kant, *Handbook of the Art of Education*, 14, cited in Heinrich Kanz, “Immanuel Kant,” in Zaghoul Morsy, ed., *Thinkers on Education*, Oxford: Oxford University, 1997, 2: 794.

¹¹S. Radhakrishnan, *President Radhakrishnan’s Speeches and Writings*, New Delhi: Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Govt. of India, 1969, 2: 260.

will set the limits of human achievement for the individual, for the nation, and for the human race as a whole.¹²

The programme of education must have provisions for self-knowledge and self-realization, initiation for which shall be given in the family setup itself. Primarily, this warrants that students must be led to objectively understand their own potentialities and the prospects. As Socrates has rightly put it, knowing oneself is the greatest learning that one can attain. Proper self-knowledge and objective assessment of oneself would convince a person of the need to learn unceasingly. A programme of education should, therefore, supplement the possible familial deficiencies in the bestowal of emotional intelligence in the student. J. Krishnamurti opines: “You can only learn when [you know that] you do not know.”¹³ Of course, providing such an insight into oneself requires an arduous task on the part of each individual as well as on the part of all those who initiate him or her into the art of human living. A deeper understanding of oneself can be facilitated not merely through textbook learning or objective sciences. Without belittling their relevance, it must be emphasized that proper guidance – through personal prayer, meditation, yoga, counselling assistance, etc., and, in general, through magnanimous inquisitiveness and earnestness on the part of the educators – has to be made available to the students so that they will experience the inner dimensions of themselves, and enkindle their own hidden energies, thus, bringing forth their own selves which would otherwise remain latent and naïve for ever. In fact, the right kind of education must have provisions

¹²This is a challenging situation for school and university education. Over the years, although the human race as a whole has advanced quite a lot in the acquisition of information and its application in multifaceted fields, in general, the standards of evaluation have remained the same. As the minimum for a pass grade in school finals and university examinations has been retained at 35% (or even less in certain cases), a good number of students have been contended to remain at the mediocre levels. Without disregarding the individual variations in human capabilities, on the one hand, and the excellence manifested in specialised fields of education, on the other, it is high-time that the responsible agencies involved in deciding the modalities of examination and evaluation took their job seriously, and make sufficient changes in terms of setting a higher standard as the minimum (or pass grade) so as to motivate our youngsters to invest their optimum and reap its fruits by way of an enriched personal life and an enhanced state of human species.

¹³J. Krishnamurti, *On Education*, Madras: Krishnamurti Foundation India, 1989, 53.

for cultivating the whole person and the totality of the mind, both of which should take into account the inner dimensions of the person. What we shall look forward in education is not the mere mechanisation of the human mind, but letting the inner core of the person to blossom by providing the right ambience and incentives in order to peak and fruition even without facilitating agents.

The role of teachers is unparalleled in the field of education and in the development of a civilization. The task entrusted with the teachers is a tremendous one, as they “have a great deal to do with the shaping of the minds and hearts of our youth.”¹⁴ Teachers are not task masters; instead, they are the animators of human creativity, the facilitators of human spirit, and the instructors in the art and science of humanizing. Therefore, we are in need of a host of teachers who are committed to initiate others into the vast sea of knowledge and wisdom. They will be effective instruments of education only if their commitment to and faith in the future of humanity are affirmative and optimistic. Teachers, therefore, should cultivate a love for human creativity, coupled with a critical attitude on the past, dynamically creative response to the present, and an optimistic outlook on the future.

In a world of “information explosion” it is impossible for any one to keep track of or to cope with the inflow of information. This is applicable in the case of teachers as well. Today no teacher will be capable of being informed about every development that takes place in different parts of the world. Indeed, every teacher must try his or her level best to get personally equipped with the advances in the field of specialisation. However, far more important on the part of the teachers is to keep themselves open to the ever new and widening horizons of human knowledge – even from among their students – so that they will never be redundant and obstructive in disseminating knowledge and wisdom among the students who are ever in search of them. Therefore, it is not the depth and breadth of the content of education handled by the teachers that become most important, but the methodologies that they adopt in reaching out to the students at different levels in their development and specialisation. It must also be stated that the information inflow in every

¹⁴Radhakrishnan, *Speeches and Writings*, 2: 202. Radhakrishnan has stated elsewhere: “Magnificent buildings and equipment are no substitute for a great teacher.” *Speeches and Writings*, 2: 104.

field calls for continued specialisation (i.e., regarding the content) and a professional approach (i.e., regarding the methodology) in dealing with the needs of students and issues emerging from teaching or student research: they have to remain incessant seekers for ever. Moreover, in order to re-tune and re-equip the teaching faculty in any institutional setup, crucially important are the highly qualitative training programmes for the future teachers, and in-service programmes for the ongoing updating and development of those who are already teachers. The updating programmes will naturally enhance teachers' ability to respond and contribute to the proper development of an educational strategy, which has to be constantly revised taking into account the tremendous and fast-paced changes that take place in our society.

It is the need of the society that the best minds are attracted to the teaching profession, as they are the key resources in developing personalities and cultures. As a World Bank study has stated, "the terms and conditions of teachers' employment are important because they determine, to a large extent, the quality of candidates attracted to the profession."¹⁵ Our societies have been highly motivated by monetary or economic benefits, and there is high demand for highly talented persons in many high-profile industries. In such a context, it is saddening to note that there is great difficulty to get the best minds in the field of education. Given this situation, it shall be a concern of every society, especially of the state, to evolve strategies to encourage and build up an excellent teaching force for the nation; if not, the future will be very bleak. At this juncture, it shall also be noted that we should not be unmindful of the present economic scenario. The state has a responsibility to see to it that the remuneration paid to the teachers – both in the public and private sectors – is on par with, or even better than, the payments received by other professionals. It will additionally motivate highly talented persons to remain in the field of education and train the younger generations along the line of greater intellectual and cultural achievements, thus enhancing the prospects of our human society at large.

¹⁵Cathy Gaynor, *Decentralization of Education: Teacher Management*, Washington, DC: The World Bank, 1998, 25. The same study notes elsewhere: "Low salaries discourage qualified people from entering the teaching profession and give those who do little incentive to improve their teaching." Gaynor, *Decentralization of Education*, 25.

In this context, when we take stock of the present educational institutional scenario everything does not fit into the ideal. Although education has to aim at the attainment of a culture or the evolution of a civilization by nurturing the latent potentialities among the students, most of the agencies and participants involved in education seem to be driven by free market economy. The triumph of capitalism in the form of globalization and its mesmerising powers, have made tremendous impact on the modern human psyche to such an extent that right and wrong are largely determined in terms of the profit or the advantage one draws from any activity, including education. From this perspective, education is also treated as one of the commodities sold in the market, and the relationship between teacher and student, or among the various agencies involved, is understood in terms of business. That is, those who impart education – both the institutions and the service personnel – become part of the selling mechanism, and the students who benefit through the entire gamut of services are the customers.¹⁶ Indeed, of late, the tendency is to locate the active involvement of the “free market” theory even in education, making it much more vulnerable to the market forces, and degrading and dethroning it from the nobler status that education enjoyed in the hitherto history of humanity. Positively, this understanding of education would bring about better accountability to students (as consumers) and an understanding of reward based on merit and performance. Furthermore, the involvement of parents in education becomes a key factor, as for most of the education parents/guardians take upon themselves the burden of payment – either in the form of direct payment of fees or as taxpayers to the government. Parents, thus, become the stakeholders in the system of education, and rightly demand better results from their wards.

Another development along this line is the dominance of career orientation both among parents and students, and hence, naturally within the educational institutions. There is no argument against training every

¹⁶The following passage from an international study is revealing: “Educational decentralization usually implies a shift in the way in which teachers and parents relate to each other. Many countries are still struggling to cope with the new role of parents as active stakeholders in education. Parent-teacher relations are most profoundly affected in decentralization programs that have a strong market focus. In Australia, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom, parents are now seen as consumers, and teachers are held accountable to them as providers of education...” Gaynor, *Decentralization of Education*, 47-48.

student to be a productive person in the society. Indeed, educational programme should have such orientations as well. However, the sad plight of the present education system is that it orientates exclusively in enabling the youngsters to meet one or other need of the industry. Development is understood in a very narrow sense, where the ultimate aim is the enhancement of certain capabilities with which one person would be able to perform a particular task, of course, in its best possible manner. In this process of enabling them for such a specialised task, unfortunately, the basic vision of education as the development of the total person is lost sight of.

When the entire programme of education is tuned to the needs of the market, students tend to miss one or the other vital dimension of life, a serious lapse that will adversely affect the humanity with dreadful and lasting consequences. For example, the Information Technology (IT) which is the most lucrative field of employment today looks for youngsters who are excellent and innovative in IT-related applications. In order to excel in such fields many a student tends to be glued to the computers and related machines, as a result of which even familial relations and socialisation are affected to a psychologically and socially debilitating extent. The same is true with regard to other professions associated with high social status, such as medicine and engineering. As the education field has turned out to be very competitive, both the students and the parents are desperately trying to get into those specialised training institutes that can assure a definite entry into the well-placed higher education institutions. Indeed, as the available seats are very limited, what happens is, at a very early stage in the development, these youngsters are force-fed with selected information, so that they are equipped to come through the competitive examinations. It is, indeed, commendable that many do it extremely well, but at a very high cost. It is not the monetary cost that I am referring to, but the shortcomings incurred by the training programme itself. By and large, it is being observed that an overstress on career-related subjects at a very early stage withholds different vital aspects of life, usually covered by the humanities (i.e., philosophy, theology, literature, history, etc.) and other value inculcating subjects, which are essential for the *humane* development of these youngsters.¹⁷

¹⁷See how prophetic is the statement of S. Radhakrishnan: “Any satisfactory system of education should aim at a balanced growth of the individual and insist on

In fact, culture or civilization that evolves from human living is not a one time product; it is created anew by different generations through their creative involvement. Such a process can be triggered only by educating the youth for creative involvement in the society by abiding to the value systems. In order to facilitate it, education must include history and classics. For, they are not merely guardians of the past; they are, in fact, the instruments to herald a bright future. Of late, however, many lament that a sense of values is being lost in the craze for professional education and money minting careers. Sharing in the riches of globalization in the big Indian cities (which is reflected even in small towns), for example, does not seem to stop with the spiralling growth rate and economic boom, but greatly results in a moral decadence, although sufficient scientific data to back up a direct relationship between these two are still lacking.

Further, an unhealthy competitive spirit that is inculcated by the industry, the parents, and the educational institutions seems to be damaging the riches of childhood and the spirit of cooperation, both of which contribute towards humanizing and civilization. Ideally speaking, education shall not cater to egoism, but to promote and practise altruism. However, given the present situation of the market-driven educational endeavours, building up an altruistic society seems to be a mirage. Therefore, being realistic, what we shall strive for is the healthy development of a person in terms of a balance between such extremes, egoism and altruism. Although the ideal of harmony may not be realized in every case, the system of education, especially educators, must deliberately strive for the same in a realistic manner. As this cannot be facilitated merely by the setup of educational institutions, a holistic cooperation between the home and school/college is essential.

Another domain that can make lasting contributions on education, especially by way of imparting a creative outlook on life, is religion. As most religions impart a positive world view among their members by accompanying them at every stage in life, the gradual process of education and the outlook imparted by it on individuals can be influenced by religion

both knowledge and wisdom... It should not only train the intellect but bring grace into the heart of man. Wisdom is more easily gained through the study of literature, philosophy, religion. They interpret the higher laws of the universe. If we do not have a general philosophy or attitude of life, our minds will be confused, and we will suffer from greed, pusillanimity, anxiety, and defeatism. Mental slums are more dangerous to mankind than material slums." *Speeches and Writings*, 1: 102.

– both as a way of life and as an institution. The delicate balancing of egoism and altruism, for example, can be communicated by educators, but can be effectively facilitated and supported by religious ideals and proven methods practised by many faithful adherents of any particular religion. The religion-education combine will succeed in cultivating a sense of interdependence (a practice emerging from the value of altruism) among individuals. They have to be aware of the fact that society is not merely a collection of individuals, but a coming together of human persons who are ready to mutually share the powers and resources for the welfare of all; interdependence among human beings is the most inspiring form of mutuality. It is not an artificial addition to human nature, but an expression of the inherent structure of humanity itself. Humanity evolves not in individual isolation, but in the community of human beings, religion being its most sublime expression.

It is interesting to note that both religion and education share a common goal of enabling and ennobling individual human beings in varied circumstances, especially in their vicissitudes of life, and in making the best out of them by employing all available means. Both have the goal of attaining fullness of human life, though the means employed are different. In fact, they are effective instruments in supporting and augmenting both nature and nurture, the given and the hoped for. The cooperative activity of these two domains, therefore, can positively contribute to the enhancement of human life at every stage of its development. The ideal in this context is a constant exchange or dialogue between religion and education so as to constantly evolve effective methods in achieving their goals. Indeed, our society witnesses the constructive effects of merging religion and education in the case of a lot of institutions, and they have been the stalwarts in heralding a renewed humanity. From time immemorial, history testifies to the power of many a religious educational institution, from village schools to large universities, as they have been instrumental in dawning and sustaining civilizations.

In history, however, we come across with instances where either religion exploits education for its own vested interests, or education misuses religion for realizing certain unbecoming motives. In both cases, however, these abuses have been initiated and their results have been plundered by the institutional forms of religion and education. Just as they can be a massive force for positive action when they affirmatively involve in the affairs of humanity, they can be destructive forces with the same

might, which would ultimately be dangerous to the cause of humanity. The best tie up resulting in creativity may turn out to be the worst, once the intentions are manipulated and the goals have been vitiated. If religion can be taken to stand for integration, and education for the attainment of knowledge, a statement by Samuel Johnson, implying the necessity of their coexistence and cooperation, is quite telling: “Integrity without knowledge is weak and useless, and knowledge without integrity is dangerous and dreadful.”¹⁸

Education, especially in the Indian context, has to adopt a trans-religious approach, where without denying religion or religious practice, space is made for knowing and appreciating other religions, with their diverse perspectives and practices. While making room for religion within education the latter must be freed from the clutches of unhealthy (institutionalized) ‘religious’ elements.

If education and religion should cooperate for the good of humanity, as I have claimed in the preceding paragraphs, one area that needs special attention is that of social justice. While every religion purports to practise and promote social justice and every educational institution instructs its wards in the principles of the same justice, they have to work hand-in-hand in order to achieve a lasting solution for the instances of injustice that prevail in our society. The tremendous potential of these institutions have to be employed in inculcating a right sense of justice (including an understanding of both equality and equity) in every individual person: this shall be the first step to build up a just society. As a Chinese proverb goes, “If there be righteousness in the heart, there will be beauty in the character; if there be beauty in character, there will be harmony in the home; if there be harmony in the home, there will be order in the nation; if there be order in the nation, there will be peace and harmony in the world.” This ideal, however, seems to be far removed from the contemporary educational scene in India. A critique on the recent pro- and anti-reservation agitation that had stirred up controversies among the educational institutions in India is indicative of the negative and counter-productive education imparted, at least as far as a sense of equity is concerned. It is unfortunate to note that, by and large, both the media and the educators are attempting to politicise the issue, thus scuttling the very idea of justice, and denying

¹⁸Samuel Johnson, *Rasselas*, chapter 41 (1759), cited in W. Jay Wood, *Epistemology: Becoming Intellectually Virtuous*, Downers Grove: Intervarsity, 1998, 58.

rightful opportunities to those deserving students from the underprivileged classes, whose present lot has resulted from the anti-social impacts of the practice of caste system over a period of thousands of years. The negative role played by the politicians, in particular, and some educators, in general, is still appalling: though they are expected to be standing for the uplift of the downtrodden – as a democratic society, at least in Gandhian understanding, should have equal opportunities for the poor and oppressed¹⁹ – what we witness is a high-profiled drama for exploiting the sensitive vote banks of the nation. Are these politicians and educators interested in the betterment of the people of the adversely affected classes? Are they envisaging the development of the nation, and the uplift of its people? Or, are they merely concerned about the aggrandizement of their political clout and strategic manoeuvring as the pathway to justice? Further, can we consider the students who resort to violent means to stop every step in the direction of equity for the downtrodden properly educated?

The single issue of social justice that we have taken up for scrutiny is indicative of the direction that the contemporary education scene is heading for. It presents us with an alarming situation: if it cannot be checked, it can destabilise a nation which is already facing many other subversive elements. It is high-time that all the involved parties – especially educational institutions, heads of various religions, and the state and central governments – cooperate in evolving an effective strategy to properly educate the younger generations, so that we can be optimistic about a creatively emerging India which will not only boast about the bygone glorious epochs, but will consciously participate in creating a life affirmative, cooperative, and cosmopolitan civilization within which everybody else can join and participate.

The complex dynamics involved in the interaction between religion and education, some of which have been introduced in the preceding discussion, have prompted *Journal of Dharma* to initiate a scholarly discussion on “Religion and Education.” Selection of this theme is also motivated by the fact that Dharmaram College, under the patronage of which functions Dharmaram Vidya Kshetram, a Pontifical Athenaeum of Philosophy, Theology, Canon Law, and Spirituality and Counselling (under whose auspices *Journal of Dharma* is established), celebrates its

¹⁹M. K. Gandhi, *Harijan*, 17-11-1946, 404.

golden jubilee in the year 2006-2007. Dharmaram College (Bangalore, India) was originally established to provide theological education to young Catholic men with the intention of training Catholic priests and Christian leaders.²⁰ In course of time, however, its horizons were opened up to the needs of the people of Bangalore, thus, initiating various educational endeavours on and off the campus, a move that has now become a mark of quality education under the leadership of Christ College (Autonomous). As per the statistics available this year, Dharmaram College reaches out to more than 15000 students on a daily basis, and the courses offered range from pre-primary education to doctoral studies in specialised subjects. It shall be a matter of pride for Christians in India, in general, and the members of the religious congregation Carmelites of Mary Immaculate (CMI), in particular, that over last 50 years, Dharmaram College, in and through all its allied and affiliated institutions, has moulded a myriad of good citizens, educators, scientists, social workers, etc., from the secular perspective, and a galaxy of well-motivated Christian priests, religious, and missionaries who continue to stand in good stead in the multi-faceted fields of Christian service carried out both within and outside India. It must also be said that Dharmaram has taken the lead in initiating positive steps in inculcating a healthy approach towards different religions, cultures, and linguistic groups. Many who have passed out of this institute have changed batons with the succeeding generations in the field of ecumenism and inter-religious dialogue and harmony. The success of “Dharmaram-style education” could also be attributed to her ability to integrate nature with nurture, the human with the divine, the secular with the religious, and the profane with the sacred. It enables each of her wards to be human beings thoroughly rooted in their own culture and tradition, but at the same time transcending their bounds and boundaries to share the riches of our common human destiny and to reach out to the unseen and

²⁰The vision enshrined in the Gospels, and later articulated in the “Declaration on Christian Education,” has been very much part of the legacy of Dharmaram: “to make a more penetrating inquiry into the various aspects of the sacred science so that an ever deepening understanding of Sacred Revelation is obtained, the legacy of Christian wisdom handed down by our forefathers is more fully developed, the dialogue with our separated brethren and with non-Christians is fostered, and answers are given to questions arising from the development of doctrine.” Vatican Council II, “Declaration on Christian Education,” §11.

unexplored horizons, thus, constituting the supreme wisdom as the ultimate aim of education.²¹

Among the entries in this issue of the *Journal of Dharma*, “Education and Concern for the Marginalized” by Thomas Menaparampil, the Archbishop of Guwahati, initiates a detailed discussion on the social responsibility of the Church in India to involve in the field of education with a motive to reach out to the poor, downtrodden, and the marginalized. A Christian perspective of education, argues Menaparampil, stands firmly against “producing human machines to serve the market.” Again, he insists: “While mobilizing resources is necessary for education, commercialization of education is degrading. While there is a place for competition and search for success in everyone’s life, there is also room for cooperation and sharing... Quality education should not mean producing snobs, parasites, and exploiters of their own fellow-beings, but leaders committed to the welfare of society.” A realistic evaluation of some of the educational institutions run by the Catholics convinces Menaparampil to call upon those educators to become inspirers and motivators who can finally realize the Christian dream of universal education.

In the second article, Maja Milčinski delves on the necessity of educators acquiring spiritual experience so that they can impart an “Education beyond Rationality,” which, according to her, should be an essential dimension of contemporary education. She asks pointedly: “What kind of education are we able to transmit to the children if we ourselves do not engage in some kind of spiritual training which would enable us to embrace life in all its manifestations and provide us with necessary flexibility for survival and growth through various crises, setbacks, illnesses, etc., which represent important tests of our daily living?” Taking cue from Buddhism and Daoism, Milčinski proposes inculcation of spiritual values through non-verbal means, including meditation. She provides an interpretation of a diagram from Chinese spiritual topography in order to

²¹The motto of Dharmaram College is “*Isabhakti paramjnanam*,” literally meaning “devotion to the Lord is Supreme Wisdom.” According to this noble vision, Dharmaram College “pays constant attention to the spiritual values to be cultivated by the students, as well as to a thorough and profound intellectual discipline to be acquired by them through *Isabhakti* (devotion to the Lord) and its ever flowing *paramjnanam* (knowledge par excellence), leading them to an integral transformation.” *Directory of Dharmaram College 2003-04*, inside cover page.

provide a trans-rational representation of the Truth and education in it. As an alternative, Milčinski proposes an approach of self-cultivation based on the mind's direct intuitive grasp of the proper Way.

The following three articles from three eminent Indian theologians, Jesudason Baskar Jeyaraj, Sebastian Periannan, and Anto Amarnad, approach the issue of higher education and faith education from different viewpoints. While Jeyaraj presents inter-faith relations as an essential ingredient of transformation achieved through higher education and the ideal role of religious educational institutions to be the active agents of transformation, Periannan articulates the methods of communication that should be employed in order to attain effective education in the institutions of higher learning. In an attempt to explicate the integral nature of religion and education from the perspective of individual and social development, Amarnad proposes that "until one's faith and learning process contribute substantially for bringing up a rich behavioural transformation and self-direction both religion and education will remain inadequate and will lose their prime purpose in human life." He positively affirms that our strides shall be supported and enhanced by "the self-directing grace of religion and liberating light of education."

In an attempt to portray the prophetic vision of an educationist from the 19th century Kerala, Sunny Punnelpambil unveils the educational charisma of Kuriakose Elias Chavara, the co-founder of the Carmelites of Mary Immaculate (CMI). With the basic vision that through the process of education "we should aim the integral wellbeing of the humankind, by contributing to the development of true human culture," Punnelpambil establishes that, for Chavara, education has to "enable everyone to take part in the mainstream social and cultural life of the land by imbibing a sense of equality and social equity." The success formula of Chavara consisted in bequeathing a method of education consisting of down-to-earth practical measures to empower the members of the society, especially the marginalized, with esteem and integrity.

Education is the right and duty of the human race: no one shall be left out of the avenues of education, so that everyone one will consciously partake in the process of humanizing and the development of mature and vibrant civilization: true education happens when that process is carried out in an atmosphere of freedom of mind. Further, no individual or movement shall try to subvert the educational processes for vested interests; not even a democratic government shall try to manipulate the

programme of education (by way of a politically motivated syllabus selection, or promoting only those who have allegiance to a particular ideology, for example) to serve its *vested* interests of the ruling political party. The same principle should be applicable to university or higher education, where in the curriculum planning, faculty selection, and appointments to high academic offices political pressures must be warded off. Scholars and scientists will be creatively contributing to the enhancement of human culture only when they function with immunity from the fluctuations of bureaucratic setup and mass influences. In fact, all universities, and other institutions of the same stature, should enjoy autonomy, so that quality education and cultural enhancement will be facilitated among the members of our society.

Education is the cornerstone of humanity and civilization. It must, therefore, receive the utmost attention from the society, especially from the authorities. Providing education for all is an inherent and uncompromising duty of the state; indeed, it is the birthright of every human being in order to augment the process of humanization. The content, the method, and the agencies in relation to the education imparted are to be given a proper vision in terms of leading all human beings to the fullness of life, by animating them to bring out their latent potentialities. As the human beings, the society, and the civilization continue to evolve, the process of education must also have a continual process of change at every level. Then, the educational institutions will be able to respond to the needs of the students in the best possible manner, responding to the needs of particular times and particular peoples, without losing their universal perspective.

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