

PASTORAL VISION ON EDUCATION

Foresight of an Educationist, Kuriakose Elias Chavara

Sunny Punnelparambil[♦]

1. Introduction

Man shares in the light of God's mind. He is justified in considering himself as an intellectual being who is superior to the material world around him, as he always searches for fundamental truths. He realizes his true and full human potential, by cultivating the gifts and values of his nature, and thus acquiring a high degree of culture. In the life of man culture and nature are closely interrelated. He has co-responsibility with his fellow human beings and the society at large. This co-responsibility is evolved through certain basic human values. This value system is evolved in the society as well as in the human being through the processes of education. Education should act as a powerful agent of liberation of the individual as well as the society. It must liberate the creative potentialities of human consciousness. Through educational processes we should aim the integral wellbeing of the humankind, by contributing to the development of true human culture.

Education is as old as human consciousness. It is a human activity. There are three dimensions in the process of education. They are, "already," "being realized," and the "not yet." These dimensions should not be separated but should be integrated. The "already" dimension is expressive of either what the learner already knows or what the educator knows and the learner has the inner capacity to consciously appropriate. The second dimension, a "present process being realized," emphasizes not what is there already, but what is being discovered by the learner as it comes to meet him or her from beyond present limitations. Here, the experiences from the present moments are more important. The third dimension, "not yet," refers to the point toward which the leading out is done. To lead out is an activity directed towards the future, towards the horizons beyond one's present limits and the not yet realized. This future

[♦]**Sunny Punnelparambil** holds a Licentiate in Pastoral Theology from the Lateran University, Rome. At present he teaches Pastoral Theology and allied subjects at Dharmaram Vidya Kshetram, Bangalore.

dimension is a transcendent aspect of educational activity; it enables people to transcend what they are to become what they are not yet, but potentially can be. It should lead him or her to a new future.

The overall aim of education is to enable people to appropriate the human values and to existentially respond to the call of their co-responsibility within the community in order to promote social transformation: through enhancing freedom, justice, and peace, making accessible knowing and loving God, and fostering human emergence, wholeness, and fulfilment.¹ Education has great significance in the formation of conscience and in the moral development of the human person. Man has the responsibility to become perfect and to help others to become perfect. So, as we attain the ultimate levels of perfection and integrity, we become the glory of God.

In the process of education, teachers should be professionally equipped and their life should be a model to the students and their skills and various apparatus should be updated according to the need of the time and circumstances. The priority must be given to the value based system of education. Kuriakose Elias Chavara,² the co-founder of Carmelites of Mary Immaculate was a man who, having taken the original aim and goal of education to his heart, had pioneered a relentless effort of educating the masses in Kerala, the southern-most state of India. Education should enable everyone to take part in the mainstream social and cultural life of the land by imbibing a sense of equality and social equity. This was the noble vision behind the efforts of Chavara. Indeed, his vision on education was an integral one. Education should enable all to assume various roles of responsible citizens in the community. It should help them to develop scientific outlook and attitudes making them aware of their rights and responsibilities. It should explore the dignity of the human person without any discrimination on the basis of gender, caste, creed, and culture. It should promote imparting knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values, which

¹D. S. Schipani, *Religious Education Encounters Liberation Theology*, Birmingham: Religious Education Press, 1988, 192.

²Kuriakose Elias Chavara is the first person to be declared Blessed from the Syro-Malabar Church. He is the co-founder of two indigenous religious congregations: one for men named Carmelites of Mary Immaculate (CMI), and another for women, Congregation of Mother Carmel (CMC). He considered the spiritual renovator of the Syro-Malabar Church and a visionary for the Kerala Society in the 19th century.

would enable them to contribute to the productive programme of the national developmental efforts. It should also have the capacity to sensitize them to the ethical, social, and cultural values which are essential in building up an enlightened nation.

2. Chavara and the Apostolate of Education

Chavara was a man who, one hundred years before the independence of India, integrated his faith dimension with the cultural heritage of Kerala and acted according to the need of the time to ensure the equality of all irrespective of caste, creed, and sex. At a time when the vast majority of the people in Kerala were denied access to any kind of education, he emphasized the need of having a Catholic Sanskrit school, where children from any religion could pursue their studies. Further, by issuing a landmark directive that schools be attached to all Catholic churches and monasteries (houses of religious life) in Kerala, he made education an integral part of his commitment to the Christian way of living. He could realize that only through education the barriers among castes, religions, and cultures could be eliminated. So, he deserves to be called “the pioneer of intellectual renaissance” of India, especially Kerala.

2.1. Educational Situation of the Catholics at the Time of Chavara

Before we come to Chavara’s educational activities, a look at the educational standard of the Catholic community of the then Kerala (Malabar) seems to be necessary to understand the path-breaking educational vision and foresight. Even in the 19th century facilities for public education were very meagre in the Travancore-Cochin part of Malabar. As a result of colonization of India by the British, the Anglican Missionaries had started mission among Jacobites. From 1816, these missionaries began to establish English schools in various parts of the country. The Catholics were prohibited to attend these schools. They were almost forbidden to study English.³ The first Catholic English medium school was started only in the year 1885. The ecclesiastical authorities of that time viewed with suspicion the learning of English, as they feared that it would bring with it the influence of the Protestant doctrine. But the knowledge of English was means to obtain government jobs and was

³Valerian, *The Servant of God, Fr. Cyriac Elias Chavara*, Kottayam: Deepika Press, 1953, 136.

considered a sign of being cultured. The government of Travancore-Cochin also began to provide more public schools; but they were very insufficient to meet the need of the public. In these circumstances, the Catholic community had less opportunities for public education compared to other communities like Jacobites, Hindus, etc.

2.2. Contributions of Chavara in the Field of Education

Chavara could recognize the backwardness of his community in the field of education. He knew that a community without education would remain undeveloped and progress would be almost impossible. Moreover, he perceived that education was one of the best means to give Christian formation to the children and to teach them the principles of Catholic faith.⁴ This conviction compelled him to initiate efforts in the field of education for the betterment of human society. So, in 1846 he started a Sanskrit School at Mannanam, adjoined to the first Monastery. A scholar in Malayalam and Sanskrit from Trichur was appointed to instruct the students. Apart from students coming from different communities, priests and seminarians also attended the school. It is said that Chavara had suggested that each parish should send a student in every year to this school at its own expense.⁵ Later, in 1864, a perceptive instruction came from Chavara, as the Vicar General of the Syrians in the Diocese of Verapoly, to start a school adjacent to every parish church. It was a prophetic action triggering a great social change in the society of Kerala. His earnestness and insistence could be seen in even sending a communication to all parishes intimidating the parish priests that they would be penalized if they did not implement the order.

Chavara took special initiative for the education of the Dalits. He insisted that the school should admit the children of Dalits and that there should not be any discrimination against them. He encouraged these children by giving them special assistance, such as books and dress. In order to help Dalits to send their children to school Chavara introduced midday meal for these children by taking contribution from the general public. We have to remember that this was done at a time when even in

⁴Joseph Kanjiramattathil, *The Pastoral Vision of Kuriakose Elias Chavara*, Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 1986, 75.

⁵P. T. Thomas, *Karmayogi* (Malayalam), Ernakulam: St. Joseph Publication, 1956, 146.

government schools admission was denied to children from low caste and Dalit communities.⁶ He strongly believed that education is a source of power and a strong means of empowering a person as well as liberating the society at large. In his last testament Chavara has emphasised the importance of a thorough educative process: “When children reach the age of discretion, they should be sent to school. Moreover, it is to be checked whether they are studying properly. On Sundays what they had studied during the previous week is to be examined.”⁷

More than one hundred and fifty years ago Chavara had such a great vision on education in the Indian society. He acted with extraordinary courage to meet the challenges of his time. By founding two religious congregations and giving instruction about starting schools attached to every Catholic parish church in Kerala, he was bequeathing his vision for all times to come and was entrusting the Catholic Church in India, and the Carmelites of Mary Immaculate and the Congregation of Mother Carmel, in particular, the great responsibility of building up the society to meet the challenges of life. By imparting the integral and person-oriented education his followers should give expression to the mind and vision of their founder. Following his vision, various Christian educational institutions should strive hard to equip and enable people to live with human dignity and mutual respect for one another.

It is the vision of Chavara that any Catholic educational institution in India should prove to be not just a guide but an inspiration and a challenge to other schools and colleges, their staff, students, and managements. By fulfilling their mission as Catholic educational institutions, they will achieve a universal presence of the Christian mind in the whole enterprise of advancing higher culture and their students will become men and women truly outstanding in learning, ready to shoulder society’s heavier burdens and witness the real faith to the world.

Chavara was not only the founder of the educational institutions in Kerala but also he was an educationist. The Kerala government declared that Kerala state is 100% literate. Without any doubt we can say that the initial spark behind this marvellous achievement is none other than Chavara. Indeed, he was a trendsetter, a man who made a difference in his

⁶T. Panthaplackal, *A Pearl Truly Indian*, Ernakulam: The Postulator General for the Cause of Blessed Chavara, 2005, 78.

⁷Chavara, *The Letters*, CWC, 4: 113.

time by taking bold decisions and practical and creative initiatives. He was an intellectual renaissance leader who walked ahead of his time.⁸

3. Values in Education

When we analyse the motivation behind the educational interest of Chavara we realize that the integral growth of the personality is his primary concern. This is only possible through a well organized value system in the life of a person. This integrity must be touched in all the levels of human development. The entire humanity is considered as one in God and everybody should enjoy the bond of love and equality. Chavara adopted the policy of “education to all” as the best possible means to lead the entire nation towards prosperity. For Chavara education is powerful than any other means to bring real integrity to the society.

Today we live in a world of consumerism. Education provides the nurturing ground for an individual’s holistic development so as to make effective contribution to the society in a dynamic environment guided by the core values, such as faith in God, moral uprightness, love of fellow beings, social responsibility, and pursuit of excellence. But today everything is seen through the eyes of marketing and profit. The power concept of education has been changed into money concept. The concept of personal and national integrity gives the way to professionalism and individualism.

Education for values is a more challenging activity because it deals with the education of being that leads further to the education beyond consciousness. The values from philosophical, psychological, and sociological perspectives encompass the whole spectrum of human efflorescence in terms of ascent and excellence. It enables one to synchronize all the essence and excellence desirable for advancement of learning and the march of human beings towards truth, goodness, and beauty. From a philosophical perspective, education for values is education of the being best harmonized in terms of education for having and loving. As John Paul II insists in *veritatis Splendor*, the only credible way to profess our faith is in the way we live our lives. This task should be actualized by the Church through her Christian education. The primary aim is not to make man a member of the Church, but to make him a Christian with values by which one can live as another Christ in this

⁸Panthaplackal, *A Pearl Truly Indian*, 73.

Challenging modern world. So various structural divisions, such as dioceses, parishes, families, schools, and catechetical centres should give leadership to empower human persons in becoming integral persons who can contribute their abilities for the well-being of the entire humanity. This is the vision of Chavara on education. It should promote oneness among the people. We are growing together, celebrating together, learning together, acting together, and believing together. So the Christian education should be capable of instilling the atmosphere of peace and harmony among the people. Through the establishment of schools along with parishes Chavara dreamed that the education should bring all the people to the mainstream of social life with an integral value system.

3.1. Values in Education from a Philosophical Perspective

Essential components of values are to be spelt out in terms of education of the highest order, which definitely directs our attention to education for self-interpretation and self-development. As education of values can be caught and can hardly be taught, value-education demands and depends on the education of the heart side-by-side with education of the head. In this respect, the role of the teacher is to ignite the students in exploring, enriching, and expressing auto-values best suited to the ascent and excellence of self and society.⁹

Education for values for the individual as well as for the society has a long way to tread for real advancement of learning. It has to consider the individual learner as a conscious and careful interpreter of whatever is true, good, and beautiful in the context of self and society. Value education should, therefore, be closely linked with value aesthetics, which, again, can only be caught and can hardly be taught. Education for values primarily demands an inquisitive search for the true concept and role of the self. From this philosophical dimension, the components associated with education for values are poignant enough to explore and re-explore the self from positive and negative aspects of development. The role of education in understanding and appreciating the self in relation to others and the Divine Self itself encapsulates the essence of values. The learner must identify within himself the positive values that lead him to re-crystallize his vision of fullness, and the negative ones standing in the way of his

⁹M. Chakrabarthy, *Value Education*, New Delhi: Kanishka Publishers, 1997, 2.

advancement. He must explore and examine each value concept in terms of truth, goodness, and beauty.

Education for values also encompasses other finer zones of development of personality. Of these, love plays a prominent role especially in relation to values that are concerned with a certain sense of delicate and sustained development of emotion. In fact, the education of love as an emotional value component is very often ignored and relegated simply because it is more prone to be misunderstood and misrepresented than to be well-adored for highlighting it as an unparalleled and pioneering value component. The essence of love is the essence of education awaiting dissemination in life and service to mankind. Therefore, the students especially in the secondary schools should be oriented in the education of love – the education that guarantees an ideal value-exercise and value-exposure both from individualistic and socialistic points of view.

Failures of the students in the arena of learning have, in most recent cases, been wrongly interpreted. It is often interpreted in terms of absence of human potentialities, which lead to hatred of the self. This becomes worse in embracing self-annihilation, which defies all good sense of values in education. Added to the failures are other emotional components like anxiety, fear, frustration, and anger, which tarnish the bright prospects of values in education.¹⁰ The components that indicate moral responsibilities, namely respect, obedience, courage, purity of thought and action, etc., are essential elements in value education. The value components ensure the challenges of education for bringing about a silent but sound revolution against passivity and alienation in education. The choice of social responsibilities leads us to appreciate the value components in the society. The values such as sympathy, kindness, co-operation, altruistic qualities of head and heart and the antagonistic components come under the canvas of education of values. The core of education for values lies in self-esteem and self-identity. Man, to be man, cannot but be reborn in revolution of values. Education for values, then definitely deserves to be serenely and successfully geared to that purpose. The arena of human failures or ignorance in assessing self-identity and self-development necessitates a rediscovery in terms of lost values in education, which must be regained.

¹⁰Chakrabarthy, *Value Education*, 6.

3.2. Values in Education from a Psychological Perspective

The education for values related to habit-formation of students necessitates a newer emphasis in bringing about a psychological change amongst learners. They should be trained in the process of practising good habits and eliminating evil ones by an appropriate approach to real life situation. The practice of the value of goodness as a form of habit has its threefold purpose. First, it allows the learner to practise it bearing all the time in mind that there must be an awakening of the excellence of individuality in him; second, this excellence of individuality should, as a basic principle of value-exposition, be geared to the awakening of mass excellence in the society. Third, as a pre-condition to safety of values in the individual as well as the social framework, the bad or evil propensities standing in the way of manifestation of goodness in habit-formation should be carefully and judiciously arrested and oriented to channelize these to the mainstream of individual and social advancement. According to Benjamin Franklin, there are thirteen virtues or values in the psychological perspective of the value for education. They are: temperance, silence, order, resolution, frugality, industry, sincerity, justice, moderation, cleanliness, tranquillity, chastity, and humility.¹¹

3.3. Values in Education from a Sociological Perspective

If education is directed towards the sociological perspective of values, it serves the following fivefold purpose:

1. Education not only remains satisfied with the advancement of learning but also positively ensures enkindling of the self for service towards others as best as possible.
2. Education becomes a communicated pursuit towards exploring and translating the essence of values best needed for the individual and society.
3. The world of the learner in terms of education for values is expanded. He enjoys the freedom in negotiating and appreciating social values side by side with his own values cherished in isolation.
4. A certain sense of heightening and enriching social sensibilities in terms of value excellence becomes an enviable reality.

¹¹Chakrabarthy, *Value Education*, 25.

5. Education for the social ascent of man is geared through exercise of value-items both individually and in groups as a common social endeavour.

To establish a new world order of compassion, peace, justice, and security, it is essential that the mankind frees itself from the limitations of national prejudice and acknowledges that the forces that unite it are incomparably deeper and stronger than those that divide it – that all people are part of the one global community, dependent on one body of resources, bounded together by the ties of a common humanity, and associated in a common adventure on the planet earth. All, then, have to join together to vindicate and realize this great truth that mankind is one and, as one, will nobly save or irreparably lose the heritage of thousands of years of civilization. This calls for setting forth the principles, which would animate and inspire us if human civilization is to survive.

The essence of education for values from social dimensions necessitates an inward approach along with the outward one which ought to spell out the most vulnerable value components related to advancement of the individual self and the social one well-coordinated and well-balanced every time everywhere. Those value-components in terms of practice and poignancy are the following: mutual respectability, admitting errors and omission of work-ethics, the right use of time, discipline, and exercise of the appropriate sense of admiration or disapproval.

3.4. Values in Education from a Religious Perspective

When we read the “Last Testament of a Loving Father,” written by Chavara, we see that he is advising the people to have a strict adherence to value system in the religious, social, and moral dimensions of life. The entire life of a man must be touched by the process of education. The relationship of man with God, nature and fellow human being is treated in this works of Chavara. The commitment of a person to his family, society, and to oneself is also discussed here. The process of education must give nine important values to bring a human person to his perfection and integrity. They are:

1. Recognizing one’s dignity as human person, created in the image and likeness of God, loved by God and invited to respond to his love. Here the value is the giftedness of human person’s ability to relate to God.
2. Respecting the sacredness of the gift of human languages, enabling one to speak of what is most deep and precious in life – the very mystery of

God himself, as well as the deepest mysteries of the human person and the rest of God's Creation. The value is the giftedness of human person's ability to know God.

3. The giftedness of human person's ability to encounter God in the ritual and communion.
4. Recognizing that one receives oneself as gift from the parents, a gift to be shared gratefully and lovingly with others – within the family and the society at large. The value is the goodness of family and social relationship.
5. Respecting our giftedness and responsibility as embodied persons, endowed with life to be respected and health to be cared for. It brings the goodness of life and health.
6. Respecting our giftedness and responsibility as sexual persons, endowed with the capacity for faithful and life-giving loving relationship. The value we have to create here is the goodness of human sexuality, enabling us to share life and love.
7. The goodness of living together in interdependence in society, respectful of integrity of the rest of God's creation.
8. It should bring the ability to see the goodness of truth and beauty and the human pursuit of both.
9. It should create the value of goodness or blessedness of purity of heart.¹²

3.5. Values from a Moral and Integral Perspective

A good society enlivens the spirit of goodness in every individual. Unless education caters to this objective of goodness, it fails to nurture good citizens. The educational system must aim at an international understanding. The Indian educational systems have a thrust on developing an international outlook: “*mata bhoomihi putro aham prithivya,*” meaning “the whole world is our motherland and, we are all children of the earth.”¹³ In very real sense, therefore, patriotism is not enough, and it must be supplemented by a lively realization of the fact that we are all members of one world and must be prepared mentally and emotionally to discharge the responsibilities, which such a membership

¹²K. T. Kelly, *From a Parish Base*, Wiltshire: Longman and Todd Ltd., 1999, 141-143.

¹³Aggarwal, *Teacher and Education in a Developing Society*, New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House, 1995, 506.

implies. So, education shall promote understanding, tolerance, and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups. As S. Radhakrishnan has rightly stated, “there is nothing national with regard to education. The different countries are provinces of a common republic of culture. There is no such thing as proletarian mathematics or Nazi chemistry or Jewish physics. Culture is international and science is cosmopolitan in its essence and reality.”¹⁴

We have to lay special stress on the teaching of moral and spiritual values. Moral values particularly refer to the conduct of man toward man in the various situations in which beings come together. The Indian National Policy on Education (1986) strongly emphasizes that the curriculum should be readjusted in such a way as to make education a forceful tool for the cultivation of moral, social, and religious values. “Psychology of the Child and Curriculum,” published by NCERT in 1983, has listed the following important moral qualities, which need to be developed in children: honesty in words and deeds, truthfulness, self-respect and desire to respect others, righteousness, self-control, duty consciousness, and compassion.

The moral developmental behaviour, which relates to honesty, integrity, truthfulness, righteousness, and self-control including right attitude to sex, is that which concerns our moral life. However, the gradual erosion of moral and social values is so deep-rooted in our economic, political, social, and religious life. This poses an imperative to try to plan for a clean life, clean politics, and clean administration as the need of the hour. Through value-oriented education we must try to acquire the power to empower the society for a healthy humanity, for education is power, and not money. Education is not meant for business but it is a service to the entire humanity. Gandhi, for example, envisages education as a means of self-realization, the attainment of truth, and the all round development of the individuals. The ideal education involves both cultivation of spirit and development of mind and body. Education, therefore, is a key for shaking off the yoke of alien cultures, and to orient humanity for a creative response to life and society: for attaining autonomy (*Swaraj*) and the holistic development of all (*Sarvodaya*). This is in tune with the aim of education that Chavara propagated in the 19th century. Education, for him, was the mighty too to bring the low caste people to the mainstream of life.

¹⁴Aggarwal, *Teacher and Education in a Developing Society*, 508.

By establishing a Sanskrit school at Mannanam (Kerala) for the public, he enabled many to shake off the yoke of discrimination of caste and creed.

4. Conclusion

Chavara was a man of great visions and initiatives. Through the educational revolution he was trying to bring harmony in the social as well as in the cultural fields. By offering education to all he was empowering the society with esteem and integrity. So, education is a process of leading the humankind to enlightenment; further, it is the most formidable tool for survival. That is, intellectual growth and economic achievements alone cannot be the criteria for an effective education; it should also include emotional maturity, social and cultural unification, and ethical awareness. Thus, education is incomplete without the formation of critical and creative habits. Also, it is to be understood that without vocational skills and technological efficiency, education tends to be an exercise in contemplation and abstraction. The purpose of education is not only to contribute to the continuity of culture, but also to change peacefully and rationally the material foundations of civilization. It must help all in the development of the spiritual, moral, mental, and physical wellbeing. This must bring forth the ability to understand and adjust themselves to the people and life in the community. It must enable them to develop a constructive attitude of responsibility to the family, town, nation, and the world at large.