

Transformation Through Education: Vision of St. Chavara

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St. Chavara Kuriakose Elias was one of the greatest educationalist and social reformer. St. Chavara acknowledged education as a mean to transform the ordinary people and to raise them to the dignified lifestyle. St. Chavara had the vision of transferring good values, holistic education for the development of all domains of human being, value education in the family, and education to sustain individual and societal development. St. Chavara's vision for education had great influence on the developments of the individual, family, society, and nation.

Keywords. Social reformer, Character formation, Value transformation

Introduction

Education plays a significant role in the lives of individuals, societies and in national development. Education is the acquisition of knowledge, the aggregate of all the process through which a person develops ability, attitude and other forms of behaviour with positive values in the society. Education is the most important tool to create a developed society and its citizens. When society takes progress in various aspects, the education must update and fulfil the needs of the time and the people. It has to take tremendous changes to maintain innovation and modernization. Education has a central role and responsibility in the transformation of an individual, in the promotion of values of respect and understanding,

and in assisting communities to confront the challenges of climate change and sustainable development. It has broadened our perspective and helped us to form our beliefs and opinions on various topics. It has made us aware of the happenings in the world. It is related to the thoughts and values as well as the behaviour of the educated person which he reflects in his daily routine life. The importance of value education and its impact in the transformation of individuals as well as the society is recognized by a great visionary of the 19th century and transformed the destiny of Kerala state and also made a global integration through this great apostolate. It was St. Kuriakose Elias Chavara, the great educationalist and social reformer.

St. Kuriakose Elias Chavara a golden milestone in the history of India. Born on February 10, 1805, he left his mortal frame on January 3, 1871. In a span of 61 years, he contributed remarkably not only to Indian society but to the world by playing the role of an exemplary social reformer, philosopher, spiritual leader and educator par excellence. As a transformational leader he foresighted the future of society and realized the power of education in transforming society. According to him, Education is the most powerful tool to develop integrated individuals, strong family and the developed nation. He identified education as a lifelong process that takes one towards self-discovery, self-perfection, self-awareness, and self-manifestation. In his vision, Education is meant to strengthen and expand the intellect and also make an individual self-dependent. St. Chavara's sole and distinctive vision on education facilitated him to provide and promote education to all people in a cast and gender dominated society.

Chavara Vision on Education

St. Chavara was a person who enriched his era with gifted leadership and extraordinary competence. He had a broad vision on education and selected it as the major means in the renaissance of the society in the 19th century. With his unique and distinctive vision, he enlightened the whole society. With the spark of education radiated from his vision illuminated the entire universe. The education envisaged by St. Chavara was a flawless blend of intellectual, practical and spiritual formation (Kuriadathu, 2013). According to St. Chavara:

A blind person who lacks the light in his eyes doesn't see anything. In the same way without knowledge, we remain ignorant of God and heavenly things. A person who doesn't

have eyes is visually blind and a man without education is spiritually blind (Complete Works of Bl.Chavara, p. 129).

For him, education is not only a teaching of some lessons, but it is a divine activity, which includes many aspects of empowering the individual in the whole realm of his life. He said that real education prepares the individual to face life's struggles with courage and develops devotion towards fellow human beings and the nation. So he paved a path for schooling for all irrespective of caste, creed, and gender. He was keen on imparting education to the poor, downtrodden and girls. He strived to uplift the society. St. Chavara was the voice of the voiceless, the strength of the weak and the power of the powerless.

St. Chavara acknowledged education as a mean to transform the ordinary people and to raise them to the dignified lifestyle. Paulo Freire, the Brazilian educationalist transformed Latin America through his methodology and educational philosophy (Pedagogy of the Oppressed) in 1970 (Ramos, 2000). But St. Chavara transformed the Indian society through his educational vision from 1864 itself when he started the first Catholic school at Mannanam (Mundadan, 2008). St. Chavara had a strong feeling that, promotion of education was essential for the renewal of the church and the transformation of the society (Vallavanthara, 2004). He had a clear vision of education which enabled him to make radical changes in the educational arena of Indian society.

The core factors of St. Chavara Education vision are:

1. Character formation
2. Value transformation
3. Integrated personality
4. Family renewal
5. Social Reformation

Character formation

Education is a process first and for mostly related to the object of character formation. According to Martin Luther King Jr, "Intelligence plus character – that is the goal of true education. The complete education gives one not only power of concentration but worthy objectives upon which to concentrate." In recent years, character building has been emphasized in education from primary school by the government. Education should produce students with good morals, 'soft skills' and 'skills for life'. They must have enough confidence and the prospect

of more responsibility to face the challenges in the future life (Hope, 2016). Education should provide ample opportunities to create a good character in the children. The basic object is to build character and to produce better human beings for the nation (Nosheen, 2006). This aspect of education was realized by St. Chavara long ago. He identified the formation of better human beings as the most important part of education. Appreciating this reality, St. Chavara insisted character formation as the main aim of the education. He instructed the parents to evaluate the study as well as the character of the children (Chavara, 1868). For him, character formation is an important outcome of education.

Value transformation

Value education is the process by which people give moral values to others. Value-based Education inspires children, young people, and adults to adopt and live positive human values. Pope Francis in his address to the students instructed to take special attention to develop human virtues. The whole enterprise of education is extricable linked with the development of values. NCERT has brought out the framework for schools on Education of values which articulates a comprehensive and pragmatic approach to value education in schools (Gulati & Pant, 2012). Education is necessarily a procedure of inculcating values to prepare the learner to lead a life – a kind of life that is satisfying to the individual in accordance with the cherished values and ideals of the society. Transfer good values to the young generation are one of the main aims of St. Chavara vision. He believed that education without values is meaningless (William & Zachariah, 2014). He initiated a comprehensive education which deep-rooted in strong fundamentals of moral and spiritual training along with intellectual formation. His letters witness to his desire to make the generations in values (Complete Works of Chavara, 1990).

Integrated Personality

According to Gandhiji, the aim of education is the all-round development of a person. The holistic approach in education make the children mental, physical, spiritual and emotional matured persons. Education should provide strong convictions and confidence in the children and make them integrated. They need to know what is required of them in order to live successfully in an integral world (Laitman, 2017). Education in the human sense of the word means that a child receives

and experiences examples from real life situations. St. Chavara insisted the holistic approach to education years back. He advised the parents and the teachers to provide knowledge and inspiration to the children to become all-around developers in their lives and to acquire an integrated personality (Chavara, 1868). A close analysis of his writings especially Chronicles, *Atmanutapam* (Compunction of a Soul), letters to the members of the congregations of CMI and CMC and the circulars to the families of his home parish Kainakary reflects his holistic thoughts. In his “Testament of a Loving Father” (a letter of 1868, addressed to the people of Kainakary, his hometown or village), St. Chavara has given valuable directions not only on family life and religious observance but also insightful directives regarding education (Chackalakal, 2013). Holistic education envisages the development of all domains of human being. St. Chavara instructs and teaches the importance of the all-round development of the person through his directions, literary works and by his example. Chavara’s greatness, in fact, consists neither of work he did nor in the contemplation he enjoyed but, in the way, did he harmonize them both in the right proportion (CMC Constitution, 2014).

Family Renewal

The relationship between schools, families, and society may provide various opportunities for promoting values such as personal development, democratic participation, and economic development. Families started to place higher importance on the concept of morality and had an increased awareness of their own moral development. The active participation of families in value education and assert that giving values education within the family will contribute to educating individuals with the values desired (Tonga, 2016). Value education in the family could be successful when appropriate conditions are provided and the right steps are taken.

A family is a unit which builds up a person’s personality. Psychologists believe that a child learns the most from his or her family life. The children are usually closer to their parents and their siblings as compared to any other person in the world. As the children grow up they find good friends, spouses, their own kids and colleagues to share their lives with. Although time brings this change the importance of family remains there. The children who have a sound family background and who belong to a family with strong family ties are almost always happier. Thus one cannot deny the importance of family life. Understanding the

importance of family in the development of an individual, St. Chavara made all the endeavours to make family blessed and holy.

Social Reformation

The foremost aim of education is to sustain individual and societal development (Turkkahraman, 2012). In the progress of a nation, the role and relevance of its education system are very important. It is the prime duty of the educational institutions to produce a sufficient number of talented and dedicated people for the prosperity of society. Education empowers individuals with the knowledge and confidence to make a difference in the transformation of society. St. Chavara realized the role of education in the social reformation and made use of this powerful tool for the same. St. Chavara himself initiated a great socio-cultural and religious revolution affecting and upsetting the social structure of Kerala. He started the social renaissance and enlightenment in society. He committed himself to espouse the dignity of the untouchables, emancipation of women, the popularization of learning through printing and distribution of books and supported women through handy craft works to earn for their family. Thus he guided the whole society from darkness to light.

Conclusion

The history of India proves that St. Chavara's education vision has a great influence on the developments of the individual, family, society, and nation. He was a luminary in all the fields and enlightened the society through his vision (Kaniampampil, 2015). Today Kerala is well known for literacy, women empowerment, mass media, social development and spiritual movements. All these initiatives were begun by a single person of great wisdom and knowledge. The spark of his inner light brightened the whole world and led to a revived future.

The educational vision of St. Chavara was unique and significant. St. Chavara grasped the power of knowledge through his deep conviction he led the whole society towards a developed future (Mannarathara, 2017). He understood the transformative power of education. He aimed at the quality education, which serves as the gateway to the socio-cultural and economic development of persons and of the country (National Education Policy of CBCI, 2007). Emphasizing the importance of moral and spiritual formation, Chavara made education available for all the sections of the society. The "liberating thrust" of

St. Chavara vision empowered the past century, the present century and the future century (CMI Educational handbook, 2012).

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